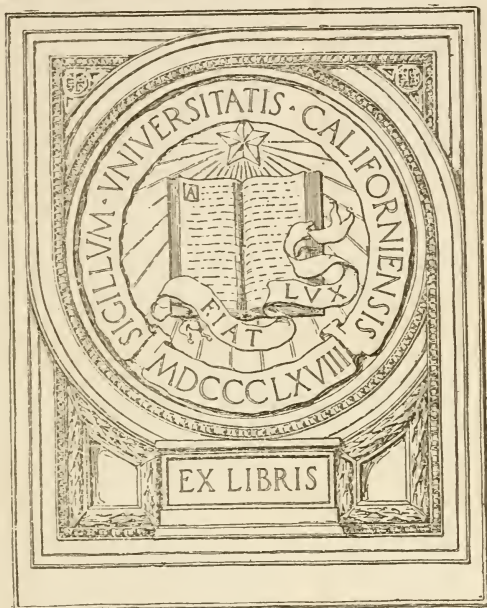


NADIR THE PERSIAN

HERBERT SHERRING

GIFT OF
HORACE W. CARPENTIER



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NADIR THE PERSIAN

NADIR THE PERSIAN

AND OTHER POEMS

BY
HERBERT SHERRING

AUTHOR OF
"THE ROMANCE OF THE TWISTED SPEAR," "GOPI," ETC

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TO
MY WIFE

The river flows,
And the quick time goes,
But together, and hand in hand,
We will follow the stream,
Through the gloom and the gleam,
Till by the great sea we stand.

We will give up our breath
Together to death.
Ah, dearest, do not weep!
For weal or for woe,
While the surges flow,
Together we'll sleep our long sleep.

And when from His halls
The Great God calls,
Together we'll wake and rise,
Up out of the night,
Up into the light
Of the Throne and Paradise.

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NADIR, THE PERSIAN

NADIR, THE PERSIAN

I

THE SACK OF DELHI

To others a devil, to me he was God,
Who ever the high way to victory trod,
As brave as a lion, and strong as a bull,
With a glorious voice, sonorous and full,
That by the stern strength of its thunderous roar
Had often rolled back the tide of war.
Yet I slew him, I of the bodyguard
His faithful captain, who should have barred
With my sword and body the road to his life
Against open force or stealthy knife.
And all for a girl with a baby face,
And a figure that moved with a languorous grace.
Her ruby lips and her lustrous eyes,
Were they worth this transcendent sacrifice?

For thirty years I rode at his side
O'er hill and valley and champaign wide.

In harry and march and midnight raid
Together we followed the soldier's trade.
In the foaming press of the wrath divine
Our stallions' hoofs trod out the wine.
The men of the desert ride swift as the wind,
But swifter followed the chase behind,
And wave caught wave and the storm passed on,
And bones gleamed white where the fierce sun
shone.

We rushed the fort of old Tabriz,
Where the red stream splashed to our troopers'
knees,
And my arm grew numb with the bloody work,
As we butchered the panic-bewildered Turk.
My arm, not his. His was made of steel,
And little of pity could it feel.
Like the sword of God made in flesh and bone,
And tempered keen on war's red hone,
He slew and slew with a tireless hate
And a lust of slaughter nothing could sate.

From a beggar's brat in Khorasan
He rose to be king at Ispahan ;
The Persian realm he held in his hand,
And all bowed low to his least command.
Like a jewel a man picks up from the mire
And sets in a crown for the world's desire,
He found the realm a thing misused,
Mishandled by weaklings, by fools abused,
And he fashioned thereof an empire great
And world renowned for its strength and state.

Together we played in the mud of the street,
Two beggars of Khorasan,
But he rose like a meteor trailing light,
And he bore me up in his dazzling flight,
And we crowned him at Ispahan.

But the lion is loath to lie down and rest,
And the eagle roams far from his mountain nest,
And Nadir, the king on high enthroned,
Beneath whose sway an empire groaned,
Was at heart still my Nadir, the riever bold,
Who lightened the caravans long of their gold.

For a year and a day by the turbid stream
Of the Tigris we lived in a lazy dream ;
Our heads were heavy with slothful ease,
And our bodies grew fat in the shade of the trees.
And then on a fiery golden morn,
The lion uprose like a god new-born,
And the bugles blew to the well-known note,
“Saddle, and spear, and ride !”
And or ever the echoes had ceased their song,
A hundred thousand veterans strong
Had leapt on their steeds astride.

The cities of Ind with gold were stored,
A harvest rich for our robber horde.
The men of Ind were lapped in sleep.
Was it right that their feeble hands should keep
Their treasures of gold and women fair,
And jewels and gems beyond compare ?

No ! no ! for the joys of life should belong
To the hearts that are bold, the hands that are strong.

The Great Mogul, the King of the East,
Came out with his force arrayed,
But we fed them with steel for a midday feast,
And the cravens ran dismayed.
We drove the fools like a flock of geese,
Till the cringing Mogul sued for peace.
The gates of Delhi were open thrown
And her priceless treasures we held for our own.

We rode through the frowning city walls,
And that night in the wondrous marble halls
Of the enchanted palace, all jewel enlaid,
Our revel we held and our bivouac made.

A legend upon the wall runs round,
Of that hall without a peer,
In golden script on a marble ground,
In Persian lettering clear,
“ If ever a heaven upon earth be found,
It is here, it is here, it is here.” *
But the night wore on, and the deed was done
At which the stars grew pale,
And even the Tartar, Turk, and Hun
Were aghast when they heard the tale,
So that on my return with the rising sun,
I wrote with my finger nail,

* “ Agar firdaus bar rué zamin ast
Hamin ast o hamin ast o hamin ast.”

In letters of red on the marble wall
Of that jewel-bedizened banqueting-hall,
“If ever a hell upon earth be found,
Ye white-livered curs, look around ! look around !”

At midnight we drank the final cup
Of the sparkling wine, when the king rose up,
And he cried, “ My comrade, young is the
 night,
I will see this town by the moonbeam’s light.”

So we climbed to saddle, he and I,
Beneath the peaceful, moonlit sky.
With half a score of troopers tried,
Forth we rode on that fateful ride.

The city lay silent. Our horses’ feet
Clanged on the stones in the empty street.
As on we rode with our bodyguard,
The windows were shuttered, the doors were
 barred.

But to us unknown, a million eyes
Were watching our reckless enterprise,
And behind each door with its bar of wood
Armèd men in waiting stood.
For the city we deemed in slumber deep
Had gathered herself like a wolf, to leap
On our weary troopers when sunk in sleep.

The King was in his merriest vein
As we passed up a narrow winding lane,
And we laughed till the echoes around us rung,

When sudden a stone from a roof was flung.
It crashed upon Nadir's stately head,
And down he fell and lay as if dead.
Upon the instant a bugle blew,
And a roar like a surging tempest grew,
And the city of Delhi awoke to life,
Athirst for revenge and armed for strife.

As a mountain cataract boiling flows,
Our lane was seething with furious foes,
But my troopers stern made an iron ring,
While I lifted to horse the wounded king.
And soon the hero's great limbs stirred
When loud the roar of the strife he heard.
At the scent of blood he oped his eyes,
(For I ween that its briny, pungent smell
Would drag him back from the gates of hell,)
A moment frowned in mute surprise,
Then shook me off as a feather light,
And firm in his saddle sat upright.
Like the Angel of Death's consuming brand,
The long sword flashed in his brawny hand.
And "Charge!" he roared, and spurred his steed,
And the stallion leapt at breakneck speed
Upon the thronging press of foes.
Back, back they surged at the sweeping blows
Of the circling sword with its razor edge,
And a path was cleft in the living hedge
As a tree is cleft by an iron wedge.
And through it he galloped and we behind.
But the streets on either side were lined

With bowmen who shot their arrows fast
Upon us as we thundered past ;
And long ere our course was half way run
Our saddles emptied one by one,
Till at length, when we reached the palace wall,
The chief and I, we rode alone
Under the archway's ringing stone,
And by the grace of a kindly fate
Unwounded we spurred through the heavy gate.

Meanwhile as our men lay sunk in sleep,
The foe had crept up the rampart steep,
And entry found in a hundred ways,
Through the secret tunnels beneath the ground
And winding passages which surround
The palace in a bewildering maze.
With a sudden shout, "Your king is dead.
We have lopped the Persian devil's head!"
They rushed on our troops bemused with wine,
And or ever the men could form in line,
They were butchered by scores as prone they lay
Or weaponless stood at angry bay.

The gate was open, the guard was slain,
Behind us the mob was racing amain.
We entered abreast, and brushing aside
The few who stood up to our steeds in their stride,
We galloped swift to the courtyard wide.
A moment our headlong course we stayed,
While the King's quick eye, like a flickering blade,
Flashed round with the warrior's practised sight

On the whirlpool of men in the swirling fight.
He heard the cry, "The King is dead!"

He saw his veterans backward borne,
Their eyes aghast with a new-formed dread.
"Was it true that their King indeed was dead?
Were they leaderless and forlorn?"

And then with the shattering roar and boom
Of the trump of God's angel announcing doom,
Above the wild tumult his voice pealed afar,
"Behold! It is I, the Nadir Shah!"
And standing forth in the wan moonlight,
He waved aloft his falchion bright.

What followed was like the magic wrought
By a dread enchanter's spell.
The panic ceased. The line was formed,
And shoulder to shoulder our veterans stormed,
With savage, triumphant yell
Of "Nadir! our Nadir!" upon the foe,
Who turned their backs and ran,
While swift we followed with blow on blow
Of our dripping swords, and we laid them low,
At every blow a man.

And then it was over. The last dying cry
Had sobbed itself out to a tremulous sigh.
Our warriors around their hero pressed,
And God and the Prophet oft-times blessed
That the King had come back to his own again.
But he cut them short. "Go! count my slain!
My heart with tears of blood could weep

For my trusting troopers killed in their sleep.
To these Delhi liars without delay
Our debt with some interest we must pay."

We counted our slain—a thousand odd.
Then Nadir swore : "By the Thunder of God,
I will make of this city a shambles red
For the wrong it has done to my troopers dead.
That our creditors grieve not at payment doled,
I will pay for each life two hundredfold.
Make haste, my lambs, for the night is old.

Four hours ye have till morn.
Two hundred thousand heads ye must bring,
For I'll royally pay my debts like a king
Ere another day be born."

His "lambs" obeyed with a ready will.

We were mad at the sight of our slain.
Our tongues were dry with the thirst to kill,
As the desert's athirst for rain.
And first we rushed on the city gates,
And strongly held them barred,
And then with the doors of the trap shut down,
We turned on the rats in the doomed town,
Of cities the most ill-starred.

We slew them by ones and twos and threes,
In batches and droves by the score.
They clung in despair to our soldiers' knees,
But we trod them down in their gore.
And with the first light of the rising sun
We wiped our blades, for the deed was done.

In the palace yard our trophies we laid,
And of them a rampart high we made.
And 'twas then I wrote with blood on the wall
Of that jewel-bedizened banqueting-hall,
"If ever a hell upon earth be found,
Ye white-livered curs, look around! look around!"

Thus Nadir, royally paying his debt,
On Delhi the seal of his vengeance set,
And naught remained but to take a toll
Of the city's treasured hoard;
And the weary day we passed in toil,
For we garnered a store of priceless spoil,
As our labour's due reward.

As a vampire sucks a sick man's veins,
And with the red stream his manhood drains,
We left the city flaccid and weak.
The people, like ghosts, too cowed to speak
Save in frightened whispers, hurried by,
Trembling to live and too craven to die.

On a winter's morn our troops rode forth,
And turned their horses' heads to the north.
No longer we flew with a raking stride,
But slowly paced o'er the champaign wide,
For a baggage train brought up our rear,
Laden high with gold and gear,
Thirty million mohurs in worth;
But the Peacock Throne was the chiefest prize,

The wonder of all this mortal earth,
All jewel-encrusted, its thousand eyes
Alive with the light of the star-strewn skies.
The lion took this for his royal share,
But the rest was divided free and fair.
Three hundred mohurs and something more
Each trooper home to his hearthstone bore.
From the day when the world began to roll,
No robber had levied so heavy a toll,
And ne'er since the sun first rose in the east,
Had the vultures been fed with so bounteous a feast.

But with every step on our homeward ride
Our hearts grew heavy with grief,
For the Nadir Shah, our King in his pride,
Our ever victorious Chief,
Grew dark and morose. An insidious change
Was wrought in his soul by a malady strange.

Was it the curse of that slaughter great
That lay on his soul with a mountain weight?
Had his reason been shaken upon her throne
On that fateful night by the blow of the stone?
He seldom spoke and he never smiled,
And his fierce eyes gleamed with a lustre wild.

He had called us "his lambs," in his humour rude,
But all was altered now.
He sat apart by the hour to brood,
And a shadow which changed his kindly mood
Lay heavy upon his brow.

In the long day's march or the nightly halt
He never forgave our lightest fault.
Without a word of reproach or blame,
The penalty dealt was ever the same.
Whatever the sin or crime might be,
A coil of rope and the nearest tree,
And a dangling form for the stars to see.

Till terror within our hearts abode,
And our heads were bowed as we sullenly rode.
With wealth that could glut supreme desire,
In our hearts there glowed an angry fire.

"He is mad," we whispered beneath our breath,
"That he hales us thus to a mongrel's death.
Are we slaves to crawl to an upstart chief,
When a dagger thrust can bring relief?
Is the man immortal who treads us down,
That we cringe like cravens beneath his frown?"

But why did I, his boyhood's friend,
My ear to these sinister counsels lend?
And why should I join the traitorous band
Of dogs who snapped at their master's hand?
Sure half a century of years

Should tame my youthful fire.
Yet I broke my faith for a woman's tears
And my oath for a fool's desire.

II

THE GOLDEN-HAIRED GIRL

AS our columns wound from Hindustan
Through the mountain land to Ispahan,
Wasted cities marked our track,
Ravaged fields and homesteads black ;
For an order was issued, stern and brief,
By the bearded lips of our gloomy chief,
To take no captives, but ever slay.
No marvel that the lengthening way
Behind us still as a graveyard lay.

The sun was setting on Kandahar,
As we spurred up the lane of the long bazaar.
Amid the stalls and wares displayed
The troopers were plying their savage trade.
On every side in the tortured air
Rose yells and oaths and shrieks of despair.
When out of the rack a girl raced by

With a trooper in swift pursuit ;
Her breath came short and her straining eye
Saw death in the spear that glimmered nigh,
And she ran with failing foot.
Her feet and shoulders and neck were bare,
And the skin showed pearly white,
And there floated behind a mane of hair
Gold red in the sunset light.

The bright point pricked the skin of snow,
When with the last strength of despairing woe,

She leaped to the neck of my rearing steed,
And clung to my mailed breast,
As a fledgeling flies in its hour of need
Home to the sheltering nest.

With fluttering lips she begged for life
And her arms around me threw.
Her hair lay yellow upon my sleeve,
And I saw that her eyes were blue ;
I marked the swell of her snowy breast,
And awoke to a feeling new,
A passionate love for the beautiful waif
Who had found in my arms a haven safe.

I thrust aside the trooper's spear,
And bore her swift to my tent,
Where she dropped upon my couch of furs
As if her life were spent,
And I stood and gazed on my lovely prize
With measureless joy in my hungry eyes.

My hair was black and burnt by the sun,
Her locks were gold by the seraphs spun
Of a tissue of fairy silk.
My sallow skin with livid bars
Had been seamed by war in countless scars,
While hers was white as milk.
The blush of dawn was on her cheek,
And on her brow a wandering streak
Where the blue vein showed beneath the snow
And pulsed to the warm life flowing below.

She told me that she was Circassian born,
In an Afghan raid from her parents torn ;
But to me it seemed as if Paradise
Had opened its gates to my wondering eyes,
And I saw a vision of pure delight
Descend from God's realm on my dazzled sight.

My fifty years of storm and stress
Bore much to curse and little to bless,
And women for me had been but joys
Of an idle hour, life's pretty toys,
To be broken and thrown away.
Now a piece of blue heaven had fallen to earth,
And my heart throbbed high with a nobler birth,
The dawn of a brighter day.

I swore I would make her my wedded wife.
Till then I would guard her maiden life
A sacred trust, as chaste as snow
That falls through the night on the plain below.

My chief's stern charge I had disobeyed.

If he learned, we both must die ;
And the need was sore to disguise the maid
From his ever watchful eye.
With walnut juice I stained the bloom
Of her ivory cheek, and the dress of a groom
Hid her woman's comely grace.
Beneath a turban's ample fold
She coiled her locks of yellow gold,
And the morrow took her place
With the buckler and spear of a fighting man
To ride with my slaves in the caravan.

From youth I had lived amid war's alarms,
The roar of the fight and the shock of arms ;
Yet my cheek with fear had never paled,
Nor at danger's call had my heart-strings failed.
But now when I rode behind the King,

My pulses wildly beat.
I trembled and shook like a guilty thing,
And his look I could not meet.
And when he threw me a careless word,
For the fear in my heart I scarcely heard.

The days were full of panic and dread.
But at night I lay on the ground by her bed.
With my trusty sword and buckler hard
I watched till the dawn in sleepless guard.

And every day for one brief hour
I drank of love's strong wine.
As the bee sips sweets from a woodland flower,
I breathed of her breath divine.
I toyed with the locks of her yellow mane,
And I kissed her red lips again and again.
I gazed in the orbs of her wondrous eyes,
Whose blue had the depth of the northern skies.
For one short hour when the sun sank to rest
I lived the life of the seraphs blest.

And she, the girl in her radiant youth,
With her smile of a trusting child,
Was an angel pure of beauty and truth
And innocence undefiled.

I had saved her from death, and she took my
hand,
And swore by the faith of her fatherland,
That she loved me more than she loved her life,
And would follow me aye as devoted wife.

And, dolt that I was, I gave belief
To a woman's languorous sigh,
And broke my oath to my glorious chief
For a wench's specious lie,
Which is ever a woman's favourite tool,
And no fool so blind as a doting fool.

At length we reached the eastern gate
Of Ispahan with her ramparts great.
That eve we could hear the *muezzin* call
As we pitched our camp by the city wall.

The Shah his charger reigned aside,
To watch the columns long and wide
Pass on beneath his eye.
The bridles jingled and the bugles blew,
But the men's black brows were sullen to view
As slowly they rode by.
Against his wont the gloomy King
Then turned to scan the endless string
Of camels, carts, and wains
Which carried the treasure, gems and gold,
The toll we levied as rievvers bold
From India's distant plains.
And among them I marked my wagons go,

Heaped high with bales and lumbering slow,
The oxen shrinking beneath the goad ;
And at their side a horseman rode,
A slender youth with beardless face,
Who sat his steed with an easy grace.

The Chief drew rein as the wagon passed,
And I felt my heart was beating fast.
My lips were white and dry my tongue,
As he questioned, "Who is that trooper young ?
His face methinks I've not seen before."
A dread struck chill to my bosom's core.
I stammered and strove to make reply
To the question stern with a plausible lie ;
When, in sudden revolt at the prick of the goad,
An ox gave a vicious lunge.
The sharp horn struck the trooper's steed,
And the beast with a furious plunge
Like a wounded buck leapt high in the air.
The youthful rider was ta'en unaware.
He lost his grip at the sudden spring,
And fell in a heap at the feet of the King.
Away the heavy turban rolled,
And abroad was flung a glory of gold.

The King's eyes oped in mute amaze,
But the figure lay still on its side.
The eyes were closed and the lips gave a groan,
And, careless of what might betide,
I sprang to earth and ran to the aid
Of the girl I loved, my beautiful maid.

I lifted the head on my knee to rest.
I bent my ear to the motionless breast.
I babbled soft words of endearing love,
Forgetting the Presence that glared from above.

At length the blue eyes opened slow,
And again the warm life began to flow.
Her wakening glance went dreamily round
As she raised herself on the dusty ground.
It came to the King, and at once she knew

The peril in which she lay.

She leapt up swift with a shrilling cry,
And strove to break away.

Then seeing the troopers around her stand,
She stayed her flight, and with trembling hand,
And almost bereft of life and sense,
She clung to me as her last defence.

“What means this comedy?” The voice
Of the King was deep and clear.

In a mocking curl his lips were set,
And I read in the tones a hidden threat,
A hint of danger near.

I was held by the glare of his menacing eye,
And I racked my brains in vain for a lie.
My wits went wandering in dismal rout,
Till the terrible truth came blurting out.

A silence followed. The girl on my arm
Shook like an aspen leaf with alarm.
His voice was deeper and yet more stern,

And a fire in the eyeballs seemed to burn.
"And so, Abdul, my boyhood's mate,
Whom I raised up from a mean estate
To power and wealth, and placed at my side,
The captain of my guard to ride,
His King's command has disobeyed,
Of his solemn oath a mockery made."

He looked askance at a spreading tree,
And I felt that my hour had come.
I tried to utter a stumbling prayer
That he'd take my wretched life and spare
The innocent blood of the maiden fair,
But my tongue was stricken dumb.
His sullen gaze came slowly back,
And went from me to the girl.
Her body grew cold, while she held her breath,
As if she felt the Angel of Death
His wings o'er her head unfurl.
With a sudden sharp and bitter cry,
She raised her face to the evening sky.
The contrast was weird of her eyes' deep blue
Against the skin with its nut-brown hue,
And the sunlit wealth of her golden hair
Was the frame to a picture wondrous rare.

The King's eyes glowed with a sombre fire
Which marked the birth of a new desire.
He gazed at the beauteous vision long,
While a change came over his features strong.
He laughed, who had not smiled since the fight

In Delhi's streets by the pale moonlight.
"My captain it seems hath a pretty taste.
'Tis pity such lovely goods to waste
By hanging on a tree.
Yet justice demands some share of delight
Should fall to thy monarch's lot. To night
Thou wilt bring the girl to me."
He stroked his beard and laughed again.
Then, turning, he shook his bridle rein,
And sped with his troop across the plain.

I looked around. A blood-red ball
The sun hung over the city wall,
And the lurid tint lay on all the land,
The fields and trees and river sand.
The sky was dark with the crimson flood,
And the air I breathed was thick with blood.
For at my heart was a murderous wrath
Which surged from my eyes in frenzy forth,
And the universal welkin dyed
With the scarlet hue of death's sanguine tide.

Like a drunken man I staggered and rolled,
But the maiden her sense regained.
She hid her hair in the turban's fold,
And when the sunlight waned,
She led me through the clamorous camp
To my tent beside the city's ramp,
And there on the floor of the goatskin tent,
I gave to my murderous madness vent.
I clenched my hands and gnawed my beard,

And my hot eyes throbbed as with embers seared.
And ever I saw the colour dread,
For the darkness itself was painted red.

My body I gave as a stepping-stone,
My breast was ever his shield.
My sword and arm had kept his head,
When my veins from a hundred gashes bled
On many a battlefield.
And now he would seize my snow-white maid
To minister to his lust,
And I must take to the trade obscene
Of an outcast base and a pander mean,
I must bring my pride to the dust.

And while I raved and tore my hair,
The curtain swung and a lantern's flare
Shone murkily on my sight.
Four men came in through the open door,
And each a naked weapon bore
Which gleamed in the wavering light.
As chiefs of note I knew them well,
And a glance was enough for me to tell
By the glint of their eyes their purpose fell.

The leader was Prince Mahomed Din,
Of the ancient royal race,
A warrior in his youthful prime,
With a smooth and handsome face.
He put the point of his sword to my breast
And in accents stern his words addressed:

"We go to slay our maniac King.
We bid thee quickly choose.
Throw in thy lot with us and live.
'Tis death if thou refuse.

They knew of the shame upon me wrought,
And had chosen their time with careful thought.
I shouted aloud with savage glee :
"In me your guide and leader see.
May the great God blast with eternal fire,
If I take not a vengeance deep and dire!"

I snatched my sword and we left the tent
Without another word.

The river mist was a shroud to the night,
And the myriad camp fires' ruddy light
Glowed smokily and blurred.

The royal canopy stood alone.

The royal banner beside
Drooped dank and limp, as it had known
The imminent fall of its pride.

The sentry challenged but lowered his spear
When he heard his captain's answer clear.
No lamp nor fire shed its cheerful ray
On the misty path which before us lay;
For this was the hour of his darkest mood,

When our dread chief sat apart,
In the gloom of his tent to cower and brood,
With the madness at his heart.

I raised the curtain without a sound,
And stood inside in the gloom profound.

I saw two eyes like a lion's shine,
And I struck with all my strength
Between the fiery bloodshot orbs,
And great Nadir fell at length.
He fell with a sob at the deadly blow,
And the stately form on the ground lay low.
The deed was done, the blood was shed,
The man whom I loved was lying dead.

And through the grey mists rolling damp
A roar went forth o'er the silent camp.
As in Delhi streets the cry was spread,
"Great Nadir has fallen! The King is dead!"

III

THE WAYSIDE ROSE

WE raised the Prince Mahomed Din
To the throne which once my King's had been.
He showed me favour and royal grace,
And set me high in power and place.

But 'twas all a pretence, a web of lies
Which hid false heart 'neath a friendly guise.
The man was naught but a libertine.
On that fatal night the villain had seen
My golden-haired girl, and with never a word,
Her beauty the depths of his passion stirred.

And the girl I loved, had she grown less fair?
Were the curls less bright of her golden hair?
Was the beauty dimmed of her radiant face?
Had her figure lost some of its wondrous grace?
Was my love for her becoming cold?
Was she less winning? Was I too old?
When I looked in her eyes, did I count the cost
Of what I had won and what I had lost?
The debt I owed, was it overpaid?
The life of a man for the love of a maid?
God knows. But something had come between.
A shadow had moved o'er our love-lit scene,
A breath of discord, however faint,
And my wooing was chilled by its cold restraint.

The King used me as a skilful tool
To buttress his throne and stablish his rule.
I slaved at my toil both early and late
To safeguard the path of his infant State.
No leisure had I for wedded bliss,
And seldom a moment to steal a kiss
From the lips that now less willingly turned
To yield the caress for which I yearned.

And then on a sudden, a bolt from the blue,
Fell the blow from the hand I counted true.

I had left the city at early dawn
On a special mission sent,
And at noon called a halt by a streamlet's flow,
And pitched my bivouac tent.

I was lying at length 'neath a shady tree,
When a horseman rode at speed,
With flying rein and stabbing spur,
And weary, foam-flecked steed.
I knew him as a trusty slave,
And, "Fly, my lord!" he cried.
"The messengers of death are fleet,
And close behind me ride.
The King himself led the fierce attack
Upon our heavy gate.
He hounded his men to ravage and spoil,
With an ever quenchless hate.
They burnt thy house and left behind
A desolation great."

"And what of the girl, the Circassian maid?"
I asked, and my heart beat fast.
"She went with the King in a litter gay,
And she laughed and sang as they bore her away.
Faith, little was she downcast."
"'Tis a lie!" I roared. "Nay, I speak the truth.
The jade has an eye for a handsome youth,
And the King—— But mount, my lord, and ride."
And he pointed across the level wide
To a column of dust which rose with the gale.
"See, the hounds of death run keen on the trail."

I leaped to my saddle as swift as light,
And urged the steed to reckless flight.
The Arabian I knew was desert born,
And the idle pursuit I could laugh to scorn.

To save my life I had little care,
But the man had said that my maiden fair
 Had laughed when she went away.
The King had done me an evil turn,
I could bide my time the dog to spurn.
 With him I could brook delay.
But the need was urgent at once to find
If the girl had gone with a willing mind.
From her lips alone the truth I must hear.
 I would trust to no man's word.
I gave the Arab his dainty head,
 And back to the city spurred.

It could not be that my snow-white maid
Had the part of a lying light o' love played.
And yet, and yet—— I thought of the past,
And the silent shadow between us cast.
Were the ripe lips cold when I kissed them last?
Was there aught of reserve in the beautiful face?
Had her arms responded to my embrace?

I savagely lashed the stallion's side,
But strive as I would my thoughts to hide,
The fiend at my ear kept whispering still
His dread foreboding of coming ill.

My knave had followed as best he could,
And when I drew rein in a little wood,
A mile or more from the city's gate,
 He rode up slow on a foundered steed.

The sun was setting and the hour was late,
And short was the time for my pressing need.

I donned his clothes and left him mine,
And bidding him wait my return,
I started on foot for the darkening town,
Where the lights were beginning to burn.
I entered the gate ere the portal was barred,
Then on by alley and road,
Till I came to the stately, massive pile,
The Persian Imperial abode.
The sentries were set, but the password I knew,
And without demur aside they drew,
Then turning my face from the careless guard,
Swiftly I strode to the palace yard.

Each winding staircase and corridor
Had been traversed by me a hundred times o'er.
I knew them like the lines on my hand
By night or the light of day,
And without falter or doubt, from room to room,
I threaded a devious way.
The halls were full of the courtier crowd,
Who bandied their jests and laughed aloud,
But they cared not a whit for the slinking knave
Who glided by in the garb of a slave.

And at last I found what I came to seek.
When I stole by a curtained room,
I heard the tones of a well-known voice
Come softly through the gloom.

I peeped within. The King and the girl,
The maid I loved, my peerless pearl,
The man whom I helped to the Persian throne,
On a rich divan were sitting alone.

In the dim light shed by the lamp on the wall
The yellow locks glowed like a waterfall
That is lit by the setting sun.
And he toyed with the curls of that wondrous hair,
As erewhile I had done.
Her cheek long since had lost its dye,
And his breath blew warm with many a sigh
On its rosy, peach-like bloom.
I could see the red flush spread and flow,
As he murmured love's language sweet and low,
In the twilight of the room.

Anon she laughed with a musical trill.
"Love him? Not I! Can an animal fill
The place of a lover true?
The man is a bear, as savage and rude.
Faugh! He smelt of blood when in his mood
He sat by my side to woo.
When his great hands pawed my hair and cheek,
I loathed him so, I could scarcely speak."

I dropped the curtain and staggered back
Against the coign of a stairway black;
For my piece of blue heaven was a strip of hell,
And down my fair hope toppling fell.
A vengeance great I would surely wreak;

I gripped my sword but my hand was weak.
My brain was reeling beneath the blow,
And my body was limp with its crushing woe.
Was it godless all this universe,
And this life of ours but a devil's curse?
If my gold-haired girl were a thing of shame,
Then virtue itself was an empty name.

I could not think. With my mind in a daze,
I stumbled back through the winding ways.
How I left the city I never knew,
For I moved in a waking trance.
I wandered on without will or thought,
My being a blank and all distraught,
Till I came without mischance,
When the dawn's first light with the darkness
strove,
To my waiting slave in the little grove.

The man was faithful to me in my need.
He placed me upon the Arab steed,
And running on foot with the rein,
He led me away to the distant hills
Which border the city's plain,
Where my Nadir and I in the days of old
Had lived our life of rieurs bold.
And there on the floor of a hidden cave
I was nursed back to sense by the faithful slave.

The days were long ere the fever lost
Its grip on the deadened brain,

But at last my reason regained its power
And I woke to full life again ;
And at once my thoughts flew back to the maid,
And her winning grace and charm,
When she sprang in her fear to the neck of my
steed,
And clung to my sheltering arm.

I remembered her rankling words of abuse.
Now I eagerly strove to find excuse
For the fault of a petulant child.
She was cast away on life's stormy tide,
So young and alone, with no friend to guide
Her path o'er the billows wild.
She did not know that I was near,
And her scornful speech could overhear.
She had called me a bear, and I grimly laughed
As I looked at my shaggy limbs
And my war-worn body, scarred and lined.
Sure here was enough to pardon find
For a saucy maiden's whims.

And then I thought of Mahomed Din,
With his handsome face and gallant mien,
His royal rank and ready tongue,
Resistless lures for a girl so young.
Was she in fault that her eyes were dazed
By the light which from a diadem blazed ?

And the Prince—here my wrath began to burn—
In truth he had done me an evil turn.

But the mood soon passed. How could I blame,
When in his place I had done the same?
'Twas a fairy tale for a poet to sing
Of a golden-haired girl and the love of a king.
And I thanked kind fate that my scimitar keen
Had not stained with blood their sweet love scene.

And what of great Nadir, the man I had slain?
A maniac he, but mad or sane,
If the deed were to do, I would do it again,
E'en though I knew I should lose the prize.

The girl was a maiden pure.
His crime was great and merited well
The penalty swift and sure.

As I muttered my thoughts, the slave at my side
O'erheard, and chuckling aloud, he cried,
"Thy maiden pure is without a spot
As the dappled pard of the woods, God wot."
My brows grew black, but he paid no heed.
"Faith! thy virgin lily is but a weed.
She was called by the folks of the gay bazaar
'The Wayside Rose of Kandahar,'
For common as air was her sweet perfume,
And her generous heart for all had room."

"Foul knave," I shrieked, "thy heart's best blood
Shall pay for the damnèd lie."
But I still was faint, and sank back slow
To my couch with a weary sigh.
He grinned again. "No lie, forsooth!

As God's above, I have spoken the truth.
'Twas the common talk of the bodyguard,
And well was it known in the barrack-yard.
If I've played false to my gracious lord,
I offer my perjured throat to his sword.
We thought thou knewest as well as we,
And marvelled that thou shouldst show
Such a wealth of love for a girl of the street
As to lay great Nadir low,
Because he had heard of the Wild Rose fair,
And presumed for a while with thee to share
In the joy of her eyes and her golden hair.
But from the loose talk of a fevered mind,
I learn that my lord is wholly blind,
And has taken a crow for a snow-white dove,
And a stroller's wiles for a maiden's love."

He ceased with a sudden, startled look,
For my weakened frame with laughter shook.
I held my sides and rolled on the earth,
And uttered wild peals of ghastly mirth.

'Twas the devil's own gibe, bizarre, uncouth.
It could not be aught but the naked truth.
How could there shine an unsullied star
In the noisome purlieux of Kandahar?
Like a boy in his teens, I, a world-wise man,
Had played the fool for a courtesan.

I laughed till the cave's deep echoes awoke
At the wit of the cruel, superlative joke.

The potent God of this universe
Is a demon, whose blessings are but a curse,
And woman the bait to His cunning lure
To catch men's feet in a ruin sure.
Virtue and goodness and chastity
Are the tools of His fiendish mockery.
What a dolt was I not to pluck the peach
When the ripe fruit had dangled within my reach !
What a fool insensate to stay my sword
As I stood by the curtained room,
When one swift stroke had been the undoing
Of their amorous sighs and their wanton wooing
In the dimly lighted gloom.

But a chance that has gone may yet return.
I would live the treacherous dog to spurn.
As he cringed at my feet I would strike him down,
And rob him at once of his love and his crown.
I was still Abdul of the bodyguard,
By a hundred triumphs tempered hard.
I had but to raise my armèd hand
To be followed by every robber band.
If old Abdul but took the lead,
Ten thousand would ride behind his steed.
And, veterans all, 'twould be no great task
To stove the new realm like a rotten cask.

And the girl? For the sake of her golden hair
I would spare the jade her life.
She should grace my cave in the barren hills,
But not as wedded wife.

And I laughed again with a bitter mirth :
Of the tinsel gauds of this crazy earth,
A woman's heart is the least in worth.

And what of great Nadir, the man I had slain ?
I forgot all else, as the drear refrain
Beat through the cells of my aching brain.

He knew the wench, without doubt he knew,
To whom all things were clear.
He had played the jest as a merry game,
Without wish or thought to put to shame
The friend of his boyhood dear.

Our riever's life by the eastern hills,
Beside the steep chasms and rock-dashing rills,
The foray and raid and night attack,
The straining flanks of his charger black,
As he led the fierce charge through the thronging
press—

All the stirring past with its storm and stress
Went by in a pageant's continuous stream,
Like the ghosts one sees in a waking dream.

And I, his friend, laid great Nadir low.
My arm had struck the fatal blow.
Like a pent-up wave which breaks with force,
Fell the direful shock of a life's remorse.
What was the love of a fickle jade,
That ever ends in grief,

Compared to the love of a man for a man,
My love for my dead chief?

I bowed my warrior's head in my hands,
As I lay on the cavern floor,
And with burning tears my eyes grew dim,
That had never wept before.

AT THE CALL OF DEATH

THE young king cried to his brother,
His foster brother Bhim,
"This life is a play of shadows,
And our day but a waking dream.
Dost thou love me, brother mine?"
And Bhim held up his sword,
"As this to me, so I to thee,
The loving slave of my lord."

The young king laughed with a sneer,
"Words are but idle breath.
So wilt thou say to mine heir,
When I am cold in death.
This world is a dance of shadows,
With fate as a mocking elf,
Where love is a jest, and this the test,
That each loves only himself.

"Thou apest love for me,
And I as roundly swear
That I love my brother Bhim
With a love beyond compare.

Words ! Words ! We love ourselves,
While the fool world onward rolls.
This the inward sense, the rest is pretence.
We love but our insect souls."

Then Bhim he stood upright,
And, "God forbid !" said he.
"What evil dream of the night
Has laid its blight on thee ?
My words thou waivest aside,
Though I swear upon the hilt.
Wilt find, my chief, 'tis no make-belief,
When thou seest the red blood spilt.

"And for thy cruel speech,
We have fed at the selfsame breast.
Thou hast lain in my mother's arms,
And been rocked on her bosom to rest.
Thy love for me thou sayest
Is pretence and foolish breath.
Though sleeping now, 'tis there I trow,
And will wake at the call of death."

The young king shook his head,
And sneered in his cynical mood,
When a gaunt man ran with a faltering step,
As if wearied by many a rood.
And he staggered into the Presence,
And bowed at the royal feet.
"O king !" he said. "The child is dead.
God maketh none so sweet.

"It was only yestreen that she played
Mid the flowers by the jungle rill,
And the tiger sprang and was gone,
And we were alone on the hill.
'Twas the wife who heard the scream.
I tracked to the devil's lair,
But little I found on the sodden ground,
Save this lock of the dead child's hair."

And he held up a raven tress,
The points were clotted and red.
"I seek revenge," he cried,
"Revenge for the child who is dead.
I have run for ten long leagues,
And my feet are worn with the race,
But back I will run, ere the day be done,
If my lord will take up the chase.

"Or give me a sword and spear.
Ere the rays of morning wake,
I will go myself to the lair,
And my own revenge I will take."
Then Bhim he whispered the king,
"Is this but idle breath ?
Here is proof enow of my words,
Love wakes at the call of death."

But the king turned round to his grooms.
"Give the man a horse," he cried.
"I take up the dead child's gage,"
And the tress in his helmet tied.

Then they rode through the darkling night,
The king and his brother Bhim,
And the king uttered never a word,
But rode as a man in a dream.

The gaunt man led them on,
Through plain, o'er stream and hill,
Till they came to the forest field
Where the tiger had made his kill.
The sun rose over the wood,
As he pointed to the track.
“'Twas a merry red, that eve,” he said,
“See, now the trail is black.”

They tied their steeds to a tree,
Looked well to spear and blade.
Then in front the king, with arrow on string,
Went softly up the glade.
They had not gone a mile,
When a leaf in the forest stirred,
And a brindled hide in a brake they spied,
And a muffled growl they heard.

The king drew string to his ear,
And the arrow to the head.
The bowstring twanged like a harp,
As swiftly the long shaft sped.
A striped form leapt away,
With a choking, husky roar,
And Bhim he laughed, “'Twas a well-aimed shaft.
See, the stones are wet with his gore.”

Hot foot they followed the trail,
Till they came to a rocky shelf,
When the gaunt man whispered low,
"O king, take heed to thyself.
Lo! the tiger's den," and he showed
A cavern's mouth in gloom,
Which opened wide in the steep hill's side,
Like the portal of a tomb.

Below in the trodden sand
Were the footsteps huge and grim,
And half buried in leaves and grass
The bones of a human limb.
Then Bhim spake a word in his ear,
As he held the king by the arm,
"I beg thee stay, my lord, this day,
Ere thou come to grievous harm.

"If thou fall, this realm of thy sires
Will be given o'er to strife.
What is the death of a child,
That thou shouldst lose thy life?"
But the young king stern replied,
"I wear the dead maid's gage,
And call it folly or worse,
I will face the beast in his rage."

Again Bhim pleaded low:
"My sovereign liege, I pray,
O think of thy country's weal.
Turn back while yet thou may."

The smile on the king's thin lips
Was bitter as salt sea brine.
"Thou fearest, Bhim, for thyself I ween.
Go back then, brother mine!

"Go back and to my heir
Bow low the servile knee!
Go back, if thou dost fear,
And leave this quest to me."
Then Bhim swore a wrathful oath,
"Tis a cowardly taunt, my lord.
So stand thou here and see if I fear,"
And he drew his gleaming sword.

He pushed the king aside,
And forward leaped with a bound,
An instant peered at the mouth of the den,
The next he was felled to the ground,
As a brindled monster sprang
Over his prostrate form,
With the savage roar of a wave-beat shore
When there's thunder in the storm.

Sprang and was lost to sight,
A splendour of black-ribbed gold,
With eyes aflame in the sun,
And again the thunder rolled.
But Bhim lay still on the ground,
His head crushed in by the blow.
There was blood on the mouth and his curls
Were tangled in the flow.

Red blood on the lips, and the eyes
Were set in a glassy stare,
And the heart of the king stood still
With the horror of his despair.
It was Bhim who was lying dead,
And the heavens grew dark with tears.
His Bhim, his brother and friend,
The playmate of childhood's years.

Together they'd laughed and wept,
And drunk of life's brimming bowl.
The cloud of his doubt was rent,
And he saw to his inmost soul.
God's truth ! how he loved the boy,
And had loved ever and aye,
And his cowardly taunt to the tiger's haunt
Had driven Bhim forth to die.

The young king stood and groaned
With the torture of lost love's pain.
He would give his realm, he would give his soul
That Bhim should wake again.
Red flames leapt up in his eyes,
The sun and the sky went red,
The forest reeled and the lurid light
Played even around the dead.

"Farewell," he cried, "my brother !
Of thy life full short was the span.
Though mine was the higher lot,
'Tis thou wert the better man."

He touched the blood on the mouth,
Marked a star on the breast of his mail.
Then gripped his spear and swiftly sped
On the track of the tiger's trail.

They were found at the turn of noon,
The young king and his foe.
The beast was stretched above,
And the man lay dead below.
The sabre fangs had torn
The body and soul apart,
But a broken spear was thrust
Deep in the monster's heart.

And the people built a pile,
As the dusk grew into night,
Where they placed the king in state
With every fitting rite,
And beside him his brother Bhim,
With the tiger at their feet ;
Thus once again the slayers and slain
In their last long sleep did meet.

When the roaring furnace of flame
Burnt the pyre to ashes fine,
The people over all
Built a stately forest shrine.
And they wrote these words on the fane,
In their ancient Eastern screed,
"Love wakes at the call of death."
The letters you still may read.

THE LADY ARRIA

WHEN Nero, the fiddler and charioteer,
The æsthete, who watched with a ghoulish leer
And a fiendish glee the torture of men,
While he rhymed to their groans with a poet's
pen—

When this devil incarnate ruled at Rome,
There dwelt in his stately, marble home
On the Pincio Hill, one Marcus by name,
A noble lord, whose spotless fame
Was unsullied by aught that smacked of shame ;
Who loved his country, his children, and wife,
And prized his honour above his life,
A kindly, generous-hearted man,
And brave on the ancient Roman plan ;
And seeing the storm o'er the Empire brewing,
He did his best to avert the ruin,
And by warning and precept and counsel wise
To open the tyrant's infatuate eyes.

This the Emperor found intensely annoying.
It is so hard when yourself you're enjoying
Right up to the top of your heart's content,
To be met by an old prig's prudish dissent.

“Surely women and wine, and a night’s wild
folly

Are better than wormwood and melancholy.

And what is the use of unlimited power,

If one cannot enjoy the fleeting hour?

The State and the country may go to the devil,

So long as the wine flows red at the revel.”

Hence, Nero at last in his wrath decreed

That Marcus must die, and the Court agreed

That the meddler richly deserved his fate,

His ideas were so hopelessly out of date.

The Imperial Professor of Cruelty

Then resolved in the fullness of clemency

That he would not waste so good a life

By a death of coarsely brutal strife,

But that Marcus should die by a way realistic,

In a tableau at once picturesque and artistic.

“The death of a man some poetry lacks

When he falls like a bull to the butcher’s axe.

Go! send for our Marcus, and give him a knife,

And bid him extract his own sweet life.

I swear we shall see the wretch snivel and grovel.

’Twill be comedy tragic—decidedly novel!”

Now the noble Marcus a spouse possessed,

The Lady Arria, of his breast

The joy and pride and dearest jewel.

And when she heard the judgment cruel,

She took the hand of the man she had wed,

And, “I’ll go with thee,” she simply said.

"The Court is a hell. Thou canst not go."

But the lady spoke most sweet and low,
"I have been thy wife for twenty years,
And have shared thine inmost hopes and fears,
Thy joy and thy sorrow, thy laughter and tears.
I have nursed thy babes at my mother's breast,
And watched one die, the youngest and best.
My husband true and kind thou hast been,
And I go with thee to the last dread scene,
And through to the shadowy world beyond.
For our hearts are knit by love's strong bond,
That has held us in life and will hold us in death,
When together we yield up our failing breath."

"It cannot be," the Roman cried.
"Wilt thou kill thyself by thy husband's side,
While the bestial Emperor grins to see
The throes of thy dying agony?
It shall not be. Sweet wife of mine,
Thy love for me is a thing divine,
But I pray thee increase not the sum of my woe,
Nor make more bitter the way I go."

The Lady Arria made no reply,

But, turning, she struck her head
Against the hard wall's marble stone,
And without a cry, or sob, or groan,
She fell to the floor as dead.

The horror-struck Marcus summoned her maids,
Who raised the languid form,

And sprinkled water and fanned the brow,
And soon the life-blood warm
Began again to pulse and flow.
The dark-fringed eyelids opened slow,
And the large eyes gazed on her husband's face.

“Without my lord no abiding place
Is this drear world. If thou refuse
The easy way that I would choose,
Be sure a harder way I will find
To follow thy steps with devotion blind.
I've obeyed my lord without word of blame,
Now my right as thy wedded wife I claim.”

The Emperor sat on his gilded throne,
While the courtiers thronged around,
And the jest and whisper through the hall
Made a sinister, sibillant sound.
With a wolfish glare their eyes were bright,
And their white teeth gleamed with a fierce delight
At the feast of blood which a kindly fate
Had spread for their delectation great.

Great Cæsar nodded. The guard threw wide
The folding doors, and side by side
The noble pair paced into the hall,
And silent stood before them all.

The husband's head was bowed with shame,
But courage shone high on the face of his dame.
Her eyes were steady and her lips were proud,
As she bravely met that jeering crowd.

Then Nero cried to his cringing court,
"My lieges all, we shall see some sport.
The craven has come to purchase life
By offering for sale his precious wife."

The red blood surged o'er the lady's face,
And Marcus groaned at the deep disgrace
Of the wicked taunt. The royal wit
Laughed loud. "Ha, ha! I have scored a hit.
But Marcus mine, thou infernal meddler,
Thou hast come too late as a huckstering pedlar
Of love's sweet goods, and thy piece of ware,
Though it passes well as an antique rare,
Unless my eyes are growing duller,
Is a trifle shop-worn and faded in colour."

The courtiers clapped their hands and roared
At the sparkling wit of their genial lord.

"But enough of this fooling," Nero cried;
"We thirst to view thy heart's life tide.
Take thou this dagger, and do not shirk!
No need to hurry in doing the work.
Press slowly and turn thy face this way.
We would feast our eyes on thy features' play."

The noble victim took the knife,
But stayed his hand, for the thought of his wife
Weighed heavy upon his brow.

His death was nothing to him.
But that she should die in open view

Of the gloating eyes of that shameless crew
Made him quiver in every limb.

At once from her husband's shaking hand
The Lady Arria snatched the brand.
With an awful light her eyes were fired,
As forth she stood like a sybil inspired.
With head held high and lips compressed,
She struck swift and strong her tender breast.
Then drawing forth the reeking blade,
She gave it her husband, and fainting, said,
While the flowing stream her life did drain,
"Take it, my Marcus! It does not pain."*

* "*Poete, non dolet.*"

A BROTHER'S GREETING

LONG years ago

The kingliest race—its like the Potter Great
Till then had never kneaded from His clay—
A race of comely giants, men like pines
So straight and tall, blue-eyed, fair-haired, and
strong,
Fiercer than forest wolves, yet beautiful
As those old gods of whom the Grecians dreamed :
The women wonderful in lissome grace,
And moving with the freedom of the deer
That flit in woodlands unrestrained, large-limbed,
Deep-bosomed, golden-haired, true hardy wives
For their strong mates ; a race that never blenched
Before the rudest shock of war or storm,
In their long boats, their Sea Swans, crossed the
sea
In many a plundering bout.

Where'er they trod

They found no equal foe, but all men fell
Before them as green swathes laid low by scythes,
Until at length they went to Northern France.
There saw the land most fertile, richer far

Than the storm-beaten rocks around the fiords
Of their sea nest ; so seized it as their manner was
To take what pleased them best, and made them-
selves

A dukedom rich and fair.

Then after lapse of time
The softer influence of the Gaul toned down
The savagery of nature that was bred
Of their wild life amid the storms and rocks ;
And they became a nation civilized,
Polished, polite, yet lost they not a whit
Of all that made them royal heretofore :
Their hardihood and fierceness, scorn of all
That was not manhood, wholly brave and pure.

And when the Gaul had taught them all he knew,
The slumbering spirit of the rover rose
And drove them forth across the stormy strait
To England, where their Bastard seized the land,
And holding, portioned it in large estates
To Norman barons, founding broad and firm
A dynasty that ruled our English land
For near a thousand years, and rules it still.

And from the time when Norman William sailed
To place his mailed heel upon our strand,
The Norman leaven working in the veins
Of our forefathers, quickened their dull blood,
Till out of Saxon earth and Norman fire
Was born the modern English gentle man,

The heir of all the ages that have passed,
The finest product of the olden time,
Who grasps the world within his nervous hands,
Ruled o'er by none and yet excelling all,
The strongest aye in body, health, and mind,
Most generous-handed, largest-hearted man.

I do not say the best that God can make,
Only as yet the best, the flower of all
Our hating, loving, sad humanity.
Though what the ripened fruit will be God knows,
By whom all's made that ever yet was made.

The vital spark that kindles in our veins,
As germ that quickens in the egg, is Norman.
Of this we boast and ever proudly strive
To prove our pedigree pure Norman blood.
The Saxon strain we blush for, being dull,
Inert, without the fierce virility
That urged the Norman on to high emprise
And crowned him king of men.

The shield's obverse
Is this. Now turn it round and see. You start.
The difference indeed is very great.
Here polished, bossed, and beautiful. There foul,
Rust-blackened, thongs and velvet padding worn,
Eaten of worms.

That old sea race of kings,
About the time when Norman William seized
And held the English land, still habited

Their rocky sea-girt fastnesses, and still
Preserved their wild sea blood in purity,
Lived out their wild sea life in savagery,
The straightest, tallest, bravest, fiercest race.
But, for the south grew civilized, and they
Maintained the old simplicity of life,
They could not match their strong disunion
Against the united weakness of the south,
And yet for generations would not tame
The roving spirit which e'er drove them on
To seek new lands and conquer, as the wave
Born in mid ocean, storm-begotten, drives
For aye, resistless, restless.

North they went
And westward, o'er a sea unknown, and dark
With storm and floating ice and barrenness.
A thousand leagues they bore, until they came
To that large land we call America.

Their track none dared to tread for ages long,
Until the Spaniard came and made a boast
Of his exceeding foresight, courage, skill,
And hardihood undreamt of, that had urged
Him first of all men o'er the unknown deep.
This task the Norseman did in boats more
rude,
Their path more northern, stormy, dangerous,
Five hundred years before Columbus' birth,
Yet made no boast thereof, as though 'twere deed
Of little worth.

The land they found was full of streams and woods,
A pleasant forest land, and for that vines
Grew thick from every little tree and knoll,
They called it Vinland in the wild Norse rhyme
They made and sang. You yet may read the runes.

The men who found it were in number small.
They brought no women with them, and the cold,
Dark Arctic winter blew and closed the path
Behind them with a chain of mountain ice.
So built they huts and spent the winter there,
In Vinland. The wide champaign round was filled
With savages, the red men, tall and strong,
Yet taller, stronger, fiercer were the Norse.
They saw the women comely, and they took
What pleased them, as their wild Norse manner
was.

The summer came, but they had formed new ties.
Their wives were pregnant, and their boats were old
And rotting, and the road to Norway long.
So stayed they all that summer. Winter came.
The months grew into years. Their children
laughed
And played about them, while the memory
Of their far home grew dim. Their wives were
good

And true. The land was rich and full of deer,
And bears to hunt, and human foes to slay.
Fair women, wine and wassail, war and hunt,
What wished they more? What more could
Norway give?

Their leaders died from accident or age.
The homeward way was soon forgot. The men,
Their brothers o'er the ocean, thought them dead,
At home grew civilized and Christianized,
Caring no more to roam, but beat their swords
To ploughshares and their spears to pruning-hooks.

So ages rolled away. A race grew up,
Half aboriginal, half Norse, that drove
The red man distant and possessed the land ;
Then, for they had no foes, grew soft with peace,
And gentle, inoffensive, knew not war,
But lived as do the Norsemen of to-day.
Save that they were not civilized, nor knew
To till the ground. Yet their descent was good.
We boast the fraction of our Norman blood,
The minute germ that makes us all we are.
But of their blood, the half was purest Norse,
And this the stronger half. The red man's stock
Was no whit worse than that of Saxon boor,
The slow, dull ox who bore the Danish yoke
With scarce a murmur, while the red man shed
His last bright drop to fend his fathers' land.

These were our brethren of an elder branch.
Of what we prize they had the fuller share.
No bluest-blooded lord, nay, not the Queen,
Can boast a strain so strong of old nobility.

Mark well the greeting of these brethren, long
Divided, joining now in strong embrace,

And kissing each the other fervently ;
For no embrace is half so strong as death's,
No kiss so fervent as the kiss of hate.

We came to Vinland, called it Newfoundland,
What had been found seven hundred years before.
We wished to civilize and Christianize,
And as the people cared not for our creed
But held their fathers' faith, resolved to die
Than yield it, we had no alternative
But butcher them wherever we could find.

'Twas very hard. We always meant the best,
But paganism could not tolerate,
Although our fathers held it long ago.
And when the land was vacant, it was ours
By right of dispossession. True it seemed
Like plunder, but 'tis meet to give reward
Unto the labourer in God's harvest field.
We gathered with our swords for sickles ; strange
The harvest withered in the gathering.

" Ah, Lord ! the heathen ragèd terribly.
Thy servants feared, but trusting in the strength
Of Thy right arm, Most Gracious God of War,
Took heart to fight, and lo ! Thine enemies,
Like chaff before a driving wind, were gone,
And their place knew them not. Not ours, O
Lord,
The victory, but Thine. For in Thy name
We fought and conquered. Praised be our God ! "

You deem my bitter words are blasphemous ;
Far better this than blasphemy of deed.
As Jacob stole his elder brother's right,
So stole we Vinland, difference only this :
We gave no pottage and our brother slew.

In scarce a hundred years his race was dead.
Burnt out, surrounded, shot, no quarter given—
A war between the lion and the sheep.
The wicked, contumacious sheep attacked.
The lion strove alone in self defence,
And God awarded victory to the right,
Which here as ever went with wealth and might.

The whole wild race is dead, no vestige left,
Father and mother, child and wife, all slain.
A deed to make e'en devils weep, but we
Have scarce recorded it. Few know the crime
That stained our grandsires' hands with brothers'
 blood,
Within this nineteenth * century of ours,
Whose progress and refinement fill our hearts
With bursting pride, and those few little care.

* Written 1895.

GRIMALDI

BESIDE his cosy fire

The kindly doctor sat,
When he heard a step at the door,
On the panel a light rat-tat,
And entered a little man,
Crooked and trembling and old,
Whose withered face bore many a trace
Of sorrows manifold.

He dragged his feet to the fire,

With a step that was failing and slow,
And he turned to the kindly doctor man

Dark eyes of ineffable woe.
"Doctor," he groaned, "in me
The saddest of men behold,
Whose clouded brain is numb with its pain,
And his heart with a grief untold."

"What ails thee?" the doctor asked,

And replied the little man,

"Nay, the body it aileth not.

'Tis the mind which bears the ban.

My body is hale and strong,
'Tis the life which is ill at ease,
With the carking care of a deep despair,
More deadly than fell disease.

“ For back of my brain there broods
A horror of grisly fear,
A sense of calamity creeping
Nearer and yet more near.
O God, the torment I bear
Of this imminent misery!
I pray thee, healer of flesh,
Canst thou do naught for me? ”

The kindly doctor smiled.
“ Tut, tut, my morbid friend!
Thy mind is befogged with fancies
That to causeless terror trend.
Hysteria is the foe,
Begot of melancholy.
Come, stir thy stumps! Away with dumps!
Take a heartful of joy and be jolly.

“ 'Tis Christmas-tide. Perchance
Thou hast worked too long at thy books,
And solitude, study, and vigil
Play the deuce with merry looks.
Cheer up! Of feast and gladness
'Tis now the roaring time.
Come thou with me! We'll go and see
The Drury Pantomime.

“ Like boys we will shout at the fun
Of Pantaloon and Clown,
Of Harlequin and Columbine,
And the jokes of old renown.
Grimaldi is the clown,
World famous from East to West,
Whose laugh has its birth in the essence of mirth,
A fellow of infinite jest.

“ He'll dispel thy grief in a trice.”
But the little man shook his head.
“ This inward gloom of approaching doom
Will not thus be banishèd.
Is this, then, thy last advice,
That Grimaldi I should see?
Can gibing grimace hide sorrow's face?
Grimaldi? . . . I am he!”

JOE RIDER'S LAST RUN

SKILLY and bread and the smallest of ale
Are Christmas cheer of little avail
When your head with palsy ever shakes,
And a hacking cough your body breaks.

It was Gaffer Hodge who whispered low
Into the ear of Rider Joe,
Rider Joe the Huntsman old
Of the Harley Pack on Harley Wold :
"Cheer up, Joseph ! Workhouse cheer !
Make the best of the bread and the beer.
It is Christmas day, and so I've 'eard
The Squire 'as given 'is solemn word
'E will send us 'is leavings of puddin' and beef.
Which I call that 'ansome past belief."

Rider Joe from his skilly scowled,
And wiping his mouth on his sleeve, he growled :
"Squire ? 'E ain't no Squire to me.
I 'ates such town-bred muck as 'e.
If my old Squire 'ad lived, do you think
'E'd 'a let me die in a work'ouse sink ?

Not much he wouldn't! Not Rider Joe,
What 'ad 'unt 'is pack, thaw, frost, and snow,
For a matter of thirty seasons good,
From the sea on the west to Rackham Wood."

"'Ush!" says the Gaffer. "Talk of old Nick,
And you'll see 'Is 'Ighness's 'oof pretty quick."

A carriage drives in through the Union gate.
The door swings wide, and in pomp and state
The Squire steps in on the formal round
Which he yearly makes as in duty bound.

The beadles bow in adoration.
The paupers vie in emulation
Which shall assume the lowliest guise
In the mighty lord of the manor's eyes.
All save one, old Rider Joe,
Who sits at his skilly, sipping slow,
Sits and never a favour begs,
Stiff in the back and bowed in the legs.

The Squire looks round in his jovial way,
And, "Who is this, Friend Beadle, pray?
"Has he rheumatics, that he sits?
Or is it lumbago, ague, or fits?
Joseph Rider? Who was he?
What? Hunted the Harley Pack? Let me see.
Have I heard of him? Not that I know.
He must have been huntsman long ago,
Under old Venn. You'll be glad to hear
The pack run better than ever this year.

We meet at the Barley Mow the morn,
For a Christmas run with hound and horn.
You'd give your ears, I'll wager a guinea,
To hear a whimper again in a spinny."

The great man passed through the Workhouse hall
With "A Merry Christmas to ye all!
My men will bring you some beef and beer
And a good round pudding for Christmas cheer."

The paupers croaked with one accord
As the carriage drove off with their gracious Lord,
Croaked their thanks and bowed full low,
Save always that rascal Rider Joe.
The beadle sailed up, all fuming with ire.
"'Ow dare you," he gasped, "hinsult the Squire?
Scum like you to sit at your ease,
When you oughter stand with crooked knees,
Athanking 'Is Lordship for 'is grace
That 'e deigns to look on your hugly face.
You can stick to your skilly and work'us brew.
None of the Squire's good things for you."

Old Joe breathed hard and his throat went dry,
But he slunk away without reply.

The Gaffer followed with "Cheer up, Joe!
The 'Ouse aint no bed of roses, I know.
But don't you take on for that beadle beast.
You shall 'ave a right 'alf of my Christmas
feast."

Old Joe broke down, his head in his hand.
"It ain't the vittles, you understand.
You're a good sort, Bill. But did you 'ear?
'The pack were better than ever this year?'
That's what 'e said. Nor 'e'd never 'eard
Of 'Untsman Joe, not a single word.
Why, the old Squire's pack were never beat
For bitches game and dog hounds fleet.
It's bitter 'ard. We're all forgot,
And the world wags on and minds not a jot."

"Don't take no 'eed," the Gaffer said.
"'Is father, the draper, ain't long dead."

But Joe sobbed out as he wiped his tears :
"You 'eard what 'e said, 'Would I give my
ears ?'
God ! I would give my soul, could I catch
Again the yelp of a 'ound,
Or follow the pack as they run on the scent
With their muzzles to the ground."

A joy in his eyes began to burn,
And, "Gaffer," he cried, "will you do me a
turn?
Cry, 'Present,' when the beadies call
My name at the roll-call in the hall.
Crack your voice and wheeze like this,
And I bet old Joe they'll never miss."

That night before the close of the gates,
Two bowed legs through them slipped,

And a little man slept 'neath the Parson's stack,
Slept and dreamed of a phantom pack,
While the rain around him dripped.

With the light of the morn the sleeper arose,
And his old bones shook in his pauper clothes.

The rain had ceased and the chill mist lay
An icy shroud on the landscape grey.
The trees in the sea fog sighing stood
Like ghosts who guard a solitude.
And the red sun loomed like a drunkard's face,
Mottled and blotched with his foul disgrace.
The little man shivered but clenched his teeth,
And plodded up the hill,
And through the long lane winding down
To the brook that feeds the mill.
And here in a field he found the bay mare,
Nosing the hay for her Christmas fare,
The old mare loved by Sir Geoffrey Venn,
Who had carried her master for seasons ten.
(The miller, good man, had taken her,
From his love for the Squire, as a pensioner.)

She pricked her ears and whinnied low
When she heard the soft whistle of Rider Joe,
And came to his call as though she knew
The voice of an old friend, staunch and true.
"Gay Lass," he whispered, "one more run,
For auld lang syne, ere our day be done.
One more gallop across the lea,
Before the dark takes you and me."

For bridle he looped a rope to her head,
Then climbed upon her back.

"Now, hey for the 'Barley Mow,'" he said,
"And the music of the pack."

The bay mare squealed at the feel of the rein,
And bucked and pranced down the winding lane,
But never an inch could she loosen the hold
Of the thin, bowed legs of the huntsman old.
He rode her easy as in a chair,
While her hoofs went dancing light as air.

And then as they passed by the silent mill,

A dog hound crept from a door,
Lifting his puzzled nose to a scent

He knew right well of yore.
The Rider chuckled with merry glee,
"A sight for my weary eyes to see.
What! Wisdom, lad! and still alive.
I bet thou'rt going on twenty-five."

He whistled again. The old dog hound
Waved a rapturous stern, gave a yelp and a
bound,
And frolicking, followed adown the lane,
Half mad with a joy he could scarce contain.

But soon Joe clambered through a hedge,
And rode by the brook through fallow and
sedge,
Picking a wary path to the Wold,
By the hollows where the sea mist rolled.

And, "Gad!" said he, "we're freaks at a fair—
A toothless hound and a broken-kneed mare,
And a rheumatic paup, a treat for to see,
What 'as took French leave on a schoolboy's
spree.

If the quality find us, they'll spoil our fun,
So we'd best keep 'id till the game's begun."

They came at length to the edge of a wood,
And through the white blindness peering stood.
Old Joe made out the "Barley Mow,"
And the horses pacing to and fro,
The pink of the coats, and the tan and black
On the dappled hides of the restless pack,
The huntsman and the whipper-in,
The burly Squire and his kith and kin,
Riding in front of the "Barley Mow,"
Where Sir Geoffrey held court in the long ago.

He brushed his eyes as the Squire loosed rein
And rode up the Harley Glen ;
The Huntsman and hounds and the pink coats
followed,

And the mist blotted horse and men.
"They'll be going to Giles' Croft, I'll be
bound,"

Said Joe as he caught the cry of a hound.
He nodded farewell to the "Barley Mow,"
And followed the hunt through the fields
below.

The pack in the spinny are ranging wide,
The bracken's alive with a black and tan
tide.

The huntsman cheers and his whip-lash long
Cracks like the shot of a gun,
And a red shade slips from tree to tree,
Through the winter woodland dun.

The red shade flits, the pack range wide,
When hark to a whimper! 'Tis Jessamy
Bride,

The good little hound who will lift without fail
A week-old scent on a trodden trail.

The pack run to her. The whimper grows
To a ringing chorus of sound,
When the black and tan billow breaks from the
wood

And pours o'er the open ground.
The red shade flies like a loosened shaft,
The pack run strong on the scent,
Their music swells like an echo of bells
That chime in a valley pent.

Behind strain the steeds over fallow and plough
With a thunder of hoofs on the mead,
Down the long valley and o'er the hill's brow,
The hunt sweeps on at speed.

"Now easy, Gay Lass! 'Tis easy that does it,"
Says Joe as he rode from a lane,
And the bay mare reared and sidled and
bucked,
As her youth had come back again.

He gave her her head, and the old horse sped
With the speed of a swallow flight,
And the pauper's heart sang aloud with glee
And his age-bleared eyes shone bright.

“Last night it was hell with their Work’ouse
bell,
Their skilly and swipes and bread.
The Parson may preach of his angels and
crowns,
But give me a gallop on Devonshire Downs,
I take this as ’eaven instead.”

But alas for age that apeth youth,
To find Reaper Time hath nor pity nor ruth!

Three furlongs on the sodden sward,
And the bay mare drooped her crest.
Her weak knees trembled, her sleek sides heaved,
And sobbed her gallant breast.
The huntsman drew rein and sorrowfully cried,
“Now, gently, Gay Lass. We must easy ride.
Thy muscles are flabby as unbaked dough,
And with bellows to mend, we must e’en go
slow.”

He opened a gate and walked her through,
And on for a mile o’er the Wold,
And here in a furrow, panting hard,
Lay Wisdom, the dog hound old,

Who, upheld by a vision of vanished prime,
Had followed the galloping scent,
To learn too soon the message of time
That the grim fates ne'er relent.
He rose with a sigh of mute appeal,
And sadly and humbly came to heel.

"Poor lad!" Joe said. "Cheer oh, my son!
For rest is near when the day is done."

Slowly and stiffly the freaks at a fair,
The toothless hound and the broken-kneed mare
And the pauper old, went on their way
Through the haunted shades of the sea fog grey.
It was silent all. The sound of the horn,
The music of the pack,
No more from the valleys faint upborne
On the echoes ran lilting back.

When they came to a stretch of downland bare
Again Joe pressed the willing mare,
And at once with the memory of her pride
She bravely sprang to her raking stride,
And e'en pricked ear and reached at her rein
When they neared a gate across the plain,
But Joe, with a gloomy shake of his head,
Cried, "An infant would know thee as thorough-
bred.

But Lass, hast forgot thy whistle and wheeze,
Thy grass-fed belly and broken knees?"
He pulled her up and opened the gate,
And the trio crept through disconsolate.

"'Tis bitter sorrow," again he said,

"That the fliers of the front
Should lag behind like a string of lame ducks
At the weary tail of the hunt."

Ever slower and slower still
The mare's feet trod the valley and hill,
Her head hung down as to deplore
Her glory of the days of yore.
The dog hound, true to the blood of his kind,
Limping and footsore, yet ran behind,
Till at length he fell with a whining yelp
That was almost a human cry for help.

Joe pulled on his rope. "So ends," said he,
"The last of all good days for me.
Now back to the skilly and Work'us cheer,
And God cut short the 'Happy New Year!'
But oh, Gay Lass, that thou and I
Could see a red fox ere we die!
Could once again be in at the death,
Though it cost our bodies' latest breath!"

As he spoke a horn in the distance blew.
He raised his eyes to the sound,
When a red fox dropped from a shelving bank
And ran slinking along the ground.
His brush was wet as a drowned rat's tail.
The red tongue lolled in distress.
The grin on his mask and the half-shut eyes
Showed his utter weariness.

Old Joe caught his breath. The mare raised her crest.

The dog hound sprang intent.

"A hunted fox, by the Lord! and the pack

Have o'errun the varmint's scent."

Joe spoke in a rapture none can tell,

And the echoes awoke to an ear-splitting yell,

That oft in the days when he led the hunt

Had driven his lagging hounds to the front.

"Tally-ho!" He dug his heels, and his steed

Forward leapt to her topmost speed.

At once all thought of age gave place

To the wild, delirious joy of the chase.

"Tally-ho!" The red fox sailed away

With the last poor strength that in him lay.

The dog hound followed, his old gums bare,

And behind Joe thundered on the mare.

At the bank the fox stole under the rail,

The hound pushed through, going strong on the
trail.

But Joe to the barrier gave no heed.

In his eyes was a dancing flame.

Once more he was Joe of the Harley Pack,

Who rode hell to leather and straight on the track,

And took every chance as it came.

Once more he yelled his View Halloo,

Then he crammed the mare at the leap.

The loyal heart within her stirred.

She rose on her haunches and light as a bird

She leapt at the barrier steep.

But how can the pride of horse or man
E'er hope to escape Time's fatal ban?

Her knees struck the rail. She crashed o'er the
bank,

Turned turtle and fell in a heap.

In a moment was up, but he lay still—

Joe Rider—as if asleep,

With his breast crushed in and blood on the
mouth,

Though a smile still wreathed the lips,

As if at the end a lasting joy

Had followed on life's eclipse.

From the field came the sound of a worry and
snarl.

Thereafter old Wisdom the hound

Limped back with a red fox in his jaws,

And laid it by Joe on the ground.

He laid it at old Joe's side on the ground,

Then whimpered and licked his hand,

And the bay mare bent down with wistful eyes,

As one who could understand.

And this is the tale of Joe Rider's last run,

Who laid him to rest when his day was done.

THE FAIRWEATHER BIRD

THE wind went by with a song,
The sky was without a cloud,
And all the dancing leaves
Clapped hands and laughed aloud.

A bird sang sweet and clear,
From the topmost branch of a tree.
"Oh come, my love, and be merry.
Take heart and sing with me."

The weather changed when the sun
Dropped down through a stormy sky,
When the wind blew fierce and cold,
And the flowers began to die.

The trees waved tired arms,
And sighed in their clothing grey.
I looked for my merry singer.
The bird had flown away.

"Oh, come, my merry singer,"
I cried in my lonely grief.
"Oh, sing to my heart in its sorrow.
Give comfort and relief."

Upon the rocky ways
I stumbled, fain to grope,
And before me fled a shape,
The wraith of a long dead hope.

And as the wind and the rain
Played carnival together,
A voice came out of the dark,
"I sing but in sunny weather."

WINTRY WEATHER

MY love is dead, her soul is sped,
All in the windy weather.
Through sun and rain, we ne'er again
Shall walk God's world together.

When first we met, the dew was wet
Upon the blossomed heather,
But now 'tis cold and I am old,
And wintry is the weather.

That joyous morn, breast high in corn
We sang love's song together.
The breath was sweet of rain on wheat,
And red the blushing heather!

And thou wert mine and I was thine
In that sweet summer weather.
Bird light thy tread! Thy sweet lips red,
Far redder than the heather.

Thine eyes in hue the deepest blue
Of harebell in the heather.
Thy voice as low as streams that flow
Through woods in dusty weather.

The years have sped and thou art dead.
We may not live together.
The world is cold and I am old.
Ah me! The wintry weather!

IN THE NIGHT WATCHES

THE thin flames flicker and die,
And the brands glow fierce and red,
As I dream of the days gone by
And a dear, dim past long dead.

Gusty and wild the night,
Yet I see in the shadow there
Two eyes of a wondrous spiritual light
And a wave of golden hair.

Pale mouth with its sorrowful lips,
O God! that the voice I could hear!
For the night rain sullenly drips,
And the wind drowns the words in my ear.

The red flames fitfully gleam
On the pride of waving hair,
Yet I know my darling is a dream
And only the midnight is there.

For the large eyes fade at dawn
When the rain beats dull on the eaves,
And the darkness flees from the sad-eyed morn
With her rout of withered leaves.

Then I rise from the fireside bleak and cold,
And turn to the garish day,
With its eager strife in the getting of gold,
Live out my life, and so grow old
In the dust of the long-drawn way.

LINES ON A PICTURE

HE flutters his night-black plumes,
 The raven, grim and gaunt,
 O'er a desert of tumbled-down tombs
 That was his ancient haunt.

The wind blows keen from the sea,
 In a wintry dawn of day,
 Salt and bleak through brake and tree,
 And wet with the sea fog grey.

The bonny black eye of the bird
 Flashes the sunlight free,
 And his croak is the gayest you ever heard,
 As an elf's in his devilish glee.

His claws are entangled in hair
 That gleams in the morning gold;
 Tresses they are of a radiance rare,
 Awash in the sea foam cold.

And the waves run in on the land,
 With a wail of storm and rack,
 Over the silver strips of sand,
 Over the marshes black.

The eddies curl and crawl
Over the dead men's bones,
Flooding the hoary chancel wall,
Lapping the altar stones.

And in their windy play,
They toss up and down a hand,
Paler than blossoms of hedgerow may,
When the spring treads light on the land.

A frozen little hand,
That languidly swings with the waves,
And helplessly clutches the silver sand
In the stiff rank grass of the graves.

And buried in the grass
Lies a little body white,
Borne by the surge to the bleak morass
In the storm of a winter night.

And pillowed on an arm,
Slender as wilding trail,
A face in a deadly, delicate calm,
A maid's little face, fair and frail.

And near it a sightless skull,
With a grimly horrible grin,
And eye-sockets empty and dull,
And shrivelled and wrinkled skin.

And above on a broken stone
 The ominous bird of ill,
 Whetting his beak on a piece of bone,
 And leisurely taking his fill.

The wind may rave in storms,
 And the sullen waters roar,
 And mist-bound wrecks like ghostly forms
 May drive on a fatal shore,

And human beings young
 And beautiful and fair
 May cry to the God who made them
 And die in their despair.

Yet the raven dieth never,
 But ever croaks in glee,
 By the multitudinous surges
 And the hoary winter sea.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

HE was sitting alone in the twilight,
In the shadowy grove by the weir,
Alone in the wintry twilight
In the sombre dead hush of the year,
With the stream flashing by in the starlight
And the sodden leaves clogging the weir.

His eyes were blotted with weeping,
As he gazed on the faded page
Of a book that was stained and yellow
And eaten away with age,
And the river went foaming and fretting
Like a wild beast shut in its cage.

With eyes that were sullen with struggling
He read the old words of fire
That had poured from his soul in its boyhood,
Ere the wings had begun to tire,
In the rosy dawn of his boyhood,
When his soul flew on wings of desire—

Old songs of his passionate yearning,
Of his angel with luminous eyes,
Of a face ghostly white as the sea foam
When the moon is low down in the skies,
Of a glory of locks like the midnight,
And a starlight of spiritual eyes,

Of a voice like the flowing of waters
 In a cavern beside the grey sea,
Of a song that was sorrowfully pealing
 In a wonder of melody,
Of a face and soft eyes and low singing,
 And the grief-laden roar of the sea.

And he closed the book with a shudder,
 As the twilight darkened down,
And the moon's shimmer swam in the eddies,
 Like the rim of a silver crown,
Now fading and flickering in shadow
 'Mong the autumn leaves yellow and brown.

And he passed from the desolate river,
 And a cry went up in the air,
Like the moan of the wind on the headland,
 A dolorous cry through the air,
Of a broken life and a vanished dream,
 The cry of a soul in despair.

DEAD LOVE

My love was a gallant young.
He lies now dead at my feet
On a bed of mosses sweet,
With the dew for a winding sheet
Around him flung.

I lift him lovingly.
His touch is chill as ice.
O sweet my love, arise,
With the light within thine eyes,
And come with me!

Come with thine own love, sweet!
He heareth not my moan,
As I lie beside him lone,
And kiss his brow of stone,
Or clasp his feet.

Upon my bosom white
I lay his heavy head.
The eyes are blank and dead.
Their crystal light hath fled,
And now is night.

The lips I used to kiss
Are blurred and red, with stain
Of thin blood washed with rain.
They will never ope again
In love's wild bliss.

I lift his boyish hands
From the heap of yellow curls.
They are small and soft as a girl's,
And whiter than the pearls
Upon sea sands.

His hair is dark and wet,
That was once a glory of gold,
As a god's in the times of old,
Or a cloud wreath of lustrous fold
When the sun hath set.

So fairly at my feet
He lieth, like a flower
Within a woodland bower.
O drear and bitter hour
That killed thee, sweet!

My night hath come. I go
To lead the loveless life
Of never wedded wife.
O weary, deathful life!
O weight of woe!

A DAY IN JUNE

A SULTRY day, a day in June,
When all the land is full of sleep,
When wild bees drawl a drowsy tune,
And 'neath the moted glare of noon
The cloudlet shadows slowly creep.

I stole into a coppice green,
And laid me down amid the reeds
That grew beside a forest pool,
Where circling eddies, clear and cool,
Ran lispingly around the weeds.

Anemones amid the moss
Nodded above my brow and eyes.
Tall hyacinths about my hair
With wandering trails all tangled were,
And violets blue as evening skies.

A trout upon the golden sand
Winnowed among the lushy cress,
And, far beyond the golden stream,
The dreamy, sunlit meads did seem
A land of slumb'rous quietness.

The song of birds was hushed in sleep,
The streamlet murmured drowsily,
When from the golden wave of light
Uprose a laughing fair face, white
As foam-drift on a sunny sea—

A maid's blue eyes and clear-cut brow,
And budding bosom, of the hue
Of chastened alabaster rare,
And waving length of ringlets, where
The dancing water rippled through.

Like lily floating on a pool,
Pearl-white, with snowy, curling sails,
She swam along the dazzling beam,
Her soft side glimmering in the stream,
Like the cold troutlet's silver scales.

Adown the long dim avenue
Of ancient willows bending o'er,
In cool green range of summer bowers,
She glided in among the flowers,
Unto the violet-hidden shore.

The ripple of her rounded arms
Washed in and lapped the idle weeds.
Her pink feet touched the silver sand,
And stepping lightly to the strand,
She stood among the rustling reeds.

I saw atween the pipy grass
The pouting sweetness of her lips,
And glorious lustre of her eyes,
As glow and flash in northern skies—
The stars upon the moon's eclipse.

The streamlet glistening in her hair,
She came to me across the glade,
And with a lover's lingering grasp,
I felt her soft arms round me clasp,
Twin vines within the summer shade—

Her creamy bosom's balmy touch,
And as the fragrant woodland flowers,
Her rosebud's mouth long clinging kiss,
While in a day dream's languid bliss
I dreamed away the noontide hours.

The broad red sun went down the sky,
The shadows stole along the ground,
A chilly wind swept moaning by,
And in the pine tops waving high
Awoke a melancholy sound.

I started up with eager arms
To clasp the vision of my dream,
But only clutched the rank, wet grass,
And, fairy light o'er a dark morass,
I saw the moon upon the stream.

Dear joy of long forgotten youth,

Faint memory of vanished days,

Dead! dead! long dead! and evening chill

Her dank robe drew o'er the woodland still

In death-grey shrouds of formless haze.

A LIFE OF SHADOWS

I KNEW a man who ever in his sleep
Had visions of old faces looking down,
White faces of his youth, nor sad nor gay,
But very passionless and wholly calm.
And in his waking life he ever saw
The same old faces of his early youth.
For he was grey and grizzled with the weight
Of many years. He had nor kith nor kin,
Nor friends, nor any ties of living men,
But lived and moved amid a ghostly world
Of shadows, he a shadow with the rest.
At times he watched the fire-light's flickering glow,
And crooned and mumbled to his inner self,
Or in the windy dawning of the day,
When the sere leaves are sighing through the air,
He walked abroad through wood and fell and moor,
With all the night's weird voices in his ear,
And beat his hands to rhythm of a song
He sang in tuneless treble, shrilly pitched,
And the bleak wind would answer shriller still.
The song? Some childish ditty he had learned
When at his mother's knee a child he played,
In that dim past in which he lived and moved.
The words I know not, but the final strain,
Which he would sing most lovingly and long,
Was, "Happy, happy, happy all the day."
For he was very happy in his life
Of dreams, with calm dead faces looking down.

IN LIGHTER VEIN

WITH AN IMMORTAL

ALL happened queerly on that April day,
When at the "Spotted Dog" beside the way
To quench my thirst I quaffed a flowing bowl;
'Twas merely ginger-pop, yet through my soul
Ran a quick fire of joyous ecstasy
As I had drunk of heady eau-de-vie.

And then the beggar-man, to whom I flung
The honest brown that on the pavement rung;
How strangely fashioned was each goblin feature,
How weirdly grinned the crossing-sweeping creature!

Also his words, "Great deeds are yet to do
By those who seek," an aphorism true
But out of place upon those bearded lips,
Where truth had long been under dark eclipse.
What meant he as he spun the coin in air,
And squinted through his mass of bristly hair?

Great deeds? But in these weary latter days
Who seeks great deeds upon the King's highways?
"But if one searched," thought I with puzzled mind,
"Would one be sure great deeds of worth to find?"

So musing came I to my home, built high
On Highgate Hill, and scarcely knowing why,
Urged on by that quick spirit in the draught
Of ginger-pop which erewhile I had quaffed,
I saddled Dobbin, old and trusty steed,
Who draws my chariot in the hour of need,
And arming me with kitchen chopper bright,
The only weapon that I found in sight,
I sallied forth, the branching oaks beneath,
Toward the pine-clad heights of Hampstead Heath.

All happened queerly. Surely ne'er before
Had I seen trees so crooked—armed, and hoar;
And this strait path across the mountain's lap
Was never marked upon my ordnance map.
The landscape, as old Dobbin forward ranged,
Was all unknown, un-English, wild and changed.
I rode as in a dream, and in my ears
Rang voices whispering of the vanished years.

When lo! the fringes of a darkling wood,
Where trees, like listening giants, bending stood,
And from their depths a voice of anguish cried,
A woman's wail upon the bleak hillside.
"A damsel in distress!" and at the word
Old Dobbin through the thicket swift I spurred,
And soon beheld a lovely maiden bound
And lying helpless on the rock-strewn ground.
But strangest sight of all on that strange morn,
Upon her face was tied a twisted horn,

A monstrous trumpet, whence her troubled sighs
Issued in hoarse, unmeaning, gibberish cries,
That seemed to prate of mountain, river, plain,
Of froth and foam, of flower and fire and rain,
And cheap philosophy in weary strain,
And ever through the babel, in and out,
The myths of Greece and Rome went by in dismal rout.

I stood in blank amaze. As errant knight,
I'd found the deed should test my youthful might.
I leapt to earth, raised high my gleaming blade,
And ran to succour the forlorn young maid.
Her bonds I severed, cut the leathern lace
Which bound the trumpet to her lovely face;
When swift uprose a miracle of grace,
A damsel, beautiful beyond the reach
Of mortal to describe in mortal speech.

I gazed in rapture, every moment growing,
While o'er my cheek the crimson blush was flowing.
Though chill the air, all lightly was she clad.
To be precise, one garb alone she had,
Apparently a sheet, which loosely flung,
From one entrancing shoulder careless hung,
Displaying more of beauty than it hid,
Which caused me drop in shame each modest lid,
That in this twentieth century of time,
Almost within the sound of Bow Bells' chime,
A damsel, corsetless, should skirtless stand
In broadest day upon our English land.

"All thanks to Zeus and thee, my gentle swain,
That I am free, unfettered once again!"
Her voice, in its melodious fall and rise,
Seemed blended of all songs of Paradise,
And yet methought my dullard sense could hear
A foreign accent in its music clear.

"What ruffians base, to every virtue blind,
Have dared such matchless charms with bonds to
bind?"

I cried, my bosom swelling high with rage.
"Tell me their names, that with them I may wage
A battle to the death with this my blade."

"They are the Asters," said the beauteous maid.
"Some fifty years ago, ah, weary me!
They bound me with the hateful thong you see,
Which bears "Incomprehensibility"
Along its snakish folds, and tied this horn,
Marked "Turgid Twaddle," tool of hateful scorn,
Upon my mouth, and led me forth to sing,
Through cities, towns, and hamlets wandering.

"Where'er this sad, mishandled form appeared,
All fled at my approach, or mocked and jeered.
No wonder! Thou hast heard the nonsense vile
Which issued from the horrid tool erewhile.
All fled from me as from a thing absurd,
From me, upon whose every smallest word
The nations hung in silent ecstasy,
In those old days when all men worshipped me."

The girl was plainly more than half insane,
Her ramblings were so dreadfully inane.
To my fond eyes her age was sweet seventeen,
And yet she spoke of outrage that had been
Upon her wrought some fifty years ago.
So, keeping still my eyelids chastely low,
The while we sat upon the mossy green
In that dark wood two rugged oaks between,
And she grew silent with the brimming tears,
I begged her lay aside her trembling fears.
('Twas perilous, the truth must be confessed,
To lay aside how little she possessed.)
Myself would guard her 'gainst all dangers nigh.
"So cease, I pray, to tremble, sob, and sigh.
And what is this you speak of outrage done
Full fifty years ago? You have begun
At most your eighteenth year."

She laughed and cried,
"My gentle swain, thy guess is somewhat wide.
Five thousand years have passed since that glad
morn
When by the Mount Olympus I was born."

Poor thing ! her sufferings had her mind distraught.
Quite mad, and yet so beautiful, I thought.
"Then who are you?" I asked, as one who tries
To humour lunatics in soothing wise.

"I am the youngest Muse, the Muse of Song.
To me all joys of melody belong.

Mnemosyne, my mother, by the spring
Pierian bore me to great Heaven's King,
Old Father Zeus. Aoide is my name,
A word blown far upon the wings of fame.
The youngest I, and comeliest all agree
Of those celestial maids, the Muses three."

No misplaced modesty was here displayed,
Yet if she quoted classics, still the maid
Might stick to what bore semblance of the truth.
"Pardon," I said, "the ignorance of youth.
I'm forty-five, a toothless babe to wean
Compared to countless ages you have seen.
The hallucination may be wholly mine,
But I had thought the Muses counted nine."

Again her laugh rang out like wedding bells,
Which clash and echo through the greenwood dells
In golden notes of jollity and mirth.
"A thick-head crew ye men of this fair earth!
We were three Muses on Olympus proud,
But me ye've multiplied into a crowd.
I weep. 'Behold Melpomene!' ye sigh.
I laugh. 'Thalia!' is the joyful cry.
I breathe into a flute. At once the fools
Cry, 'Euterpe, who teaches lyric rules!'
I sing of love and strike the melting lyre.
'O Erato,' they pray, 'give each man his desire.'
But ever I am one and one alone,
Aoide, from Olympus hither flown,
Immortal Muse of Poesie and Song,
Whose name Fame echoes through the ages long."

She'd scored her point. I felt myself at check.
And yet it were one's sanity to wreck
If I, a sober man with grizzled head,
Should take as gospel all this maiden said.
But oh! the glorious tones of that full voice
That seemed to bid the universe rejoice,
So pulsing were its notes of joy and gladness.
Yet all must be mere moonshine, folly, madness

I stole a timid look. At once she read
Suspicion in my glance, and swiftly said,
"Thou wilt not credence give, a mortal man?
Thou dardest immortal beauty calmly scan,
And not believe the simple words I speak?
I will not pray Great Zeus my vengeance wreak,
But for thou hast done service, I'll be kind,
And prove my words to e'en thy mortal mind."

She held me with the splendour of her eyes,
The blue all fathomless of midnight skies,
And as I gazed entranced, her voice again
Burst forth in wondrous song of joy and pain.
At first 'twas low, but slowly gathering force,
It pealed at length in full, majestic course.
She sang of men and women, love and war,
Of peace and plenty and the strife's deep roar.
Of gallant deeds, true hearts, and sinewy hands,
Of knowledge spreading through earth's distant
lands,
Nobility that scorns to think of self,
Or sell another's good for sordid pelf.

On every varied theme her song ranged wide,
And as she sang, the hoary oak beside,
The pictures rose before me. I could see
The shock of battle on the ensanguined lea,
The charge of heroes in a hopeless fight,
The heaps of slain beneath the moon's wan light.
And then, as changed the music's magic mood,
I heard within a sylvan solitude
A youthful lover pleading sweet and low,
And marked the maiden's cheek with blushes
glow.

Whate'er her theme, I saw before me pass
The living forms as mirrored in a glass.
And still, however loud or low her strain,
A thread of joy was woven with the pain,
That blended all into a magic whole,
And held me captive, body, mind, and soul.

At length she ceased. "And dost thou now re-
ceive
My words as naked truth? Wilt thou believe?"

I cried, "Thy pardon for a grievous wrong.
Aoide art thou, matchless Queen of Song.
No mortal thus could sing in notes sublime.
No earthly song can vie with the witchery of thy
rhyme."

She smiled a happy smile of glad content.
"I have not sung like that since Algie went.

Could'st thou remember aught of my wild strain,
Its faintest echo reproduce again,
Thy fame to earth's four corners swift would fly,
And thou would be immortal, e'en as I."

A pang of jealousy my bosom fired.
"And who was Algie, prithee?" I enquired.

"He was my latest lover. None more true."
A tear welled up and marred her eyes' deep blue.
Sarcastic grew my speech. "The latest he?
Is then the list so long of those who wooed
thee?"

"Some thousands at the least," she simply said,
And shook the ringlets on her golden head.
"The merry times we've had! There was wild
Will.

What pranks we played on Falstaff at Gadshill!
And Dan, whose jests were sometimes rather
naughty;

And Edmund, quite the courtier, prim and
haughty;

And solemn John. I fear I yawned at times,
So melancholic his transcendent chimes.

And later there was Georgie with the curls,
Too fond of foolish toying with the girls;

And Percy, mad, poor boy, but half divine,
His song caught true the melody of mine.

And W. W., worthy man. Alas!

He made that trumpet lying on the grass.

From him the Asters stole it ; and the thong
Erewhile to Robert B. did once belong.
Vile things ! Put on that trumpet ! It will roar
Its dreary platitudes for evermore.
The words to wisdom make a fond pretence,
But analysed, possess no shred of sense.
The Asters stole them. Strange that lovers true
With tools like these their fame should quite undo."

"Who are these villain Asters, prithee, say,
Who've dared a ruffian hand upon thee lay ?"

"The Poetasters," she replied, "are they.
"For fifty years they held me up to scorn,
Until I wished I never had been born.
At last they tired of their insensate joke,
And left me helpless, bound beneath this oak."

I gazed upon her charms, no longer shy,
And cried, "For thee I dare to do and die.
Thy foes shall perish. See ! Their doom is nigh,"
And valiantly I waved my chopper high.
"But——" (here I stammered). "Algie having passed,
Thou hast no lover now, he being last.
Might I presume ?"

"What, thou ?" she quickly said,
And gazed intently on my grizzled head.
('Tis strange how quick a woman will discover
A trifling blemish in a would-be lover.)
But seeing then the yearning in my eyes,
Her voice grew softer. "High indeed the prize

For which thou strivest. Know, that ere I place
My seal of love accepted on thy face,
Thou first must take thy oath my law to obey."

"I swear by all that's lovely. Tell it, pray."

"The canons are most simple. Ne'er be dull,
For Dullness Beauty's flowers can never cull.
Discard all talk of rocks and stones and trees,
Of mountains, rivers, storms, and whispering breeze.
They've had their day. Be firm. Thy heart be
hardening.

Few joys so tame as those of landscape gardening.
Sing thou of men and women. Mortal elves
Do take their keenest interest in themselves.
Eschew description! To thy heroes give
A life of action, that we see them live.
Be not too sad! This little world below
Contains more store of happiness than woe.
Simple and clear be thy melodious speech,
And never do thou dare attempt to teach.
For who art thou to desecrate my art
By playing vilely a schoolmaster's part?
In grave or gay, do thou for ever strive
To capture Beauty, radiant and alive.
And touch not tales of ancient Greece and Rome.
They're done to death. Do thou sing nearer home.
When no man knows their classic tongues to
speak,
Then why be always harping of the Roman and
the Greek?

“But if thou needs must pull the well-worn string,

Then do not in thy verse e'er dare to sing
One line of that exasperating tale
Whose frightful boredom makes my senses quail,
That story dull of hopeless misery,
The woes of Orpheus and Eurydice.
I might forgive all else, but do this crime,
And thou and I are strangers for all time.
If thou knew everything . . . But, never mind!
Old scandals are as vain as empty wind.

“There is my law, the which thou must obey,
If with me as my lover thou wouldst stray.”

“I swear to do thy bidding,” straight I cried.
“And as for Orpheus' unhappy bride,
That type of weeping wife, Eurydice,
She is in hell. There let her stay for me.
Thy seal upon my lips! Oh, joy divine
To clasp Aoide, heavenly Muse, as mine!”

She stepped towards me, as a meteor bright,
Young, lithe, and warm, a vision of delight.
Anon she laughed and placed her fingers slender
Upon my eyes, caress most sweet and tender,
And on my lips I felt a touch as soft
As if a bird its silken wing did waft.
And then——

A raucous cry the silence broke,
And with a start and shudder, I awoke.

Where was Aoide? Swift I looked around,
But of the Muse of Song no trace I found.
The scene was changed. I lay on Hampstead
Heath,
And close beside, a pine-tree huge beneath,
A coster and his donah played together.
His lips she tickled with her ostrich feather,
The while he shut his eyes in hope of bliss;
Whereat she gaily laughed, the saucy Miss,
“Garn, yer April Fool! Yer thought it was a
kiss.”

THE "HEART'S DELIGHT"

I

THE wind blew fresh from the west by south,
 And the storm rack rolled up from the Channel's
 mouth,
 Grumbling with thunder and wet with brine,
 As out of the Downs swept the British line.
 And head of them all went the "Heart's Delight,"
 Commander Jack Malvern, belted knight.

For Sir John had taken old Monk aside
 When they met at the door of the "Blushing
 Bride"—

Old Monk, our admiral, staunch and true,
 None ever better who sailed the blue—
 And he said, "Admiral Monk, I'd have you to
 know

I ride straight as a die at the 'Tally-ho.'
 There's no man living can teach me aught
 Of the ways of a horse, how he's sold or bought,
 Or bred or broke, whether jade or a devil,
 Held at the timber or spurred on the level.
 But split me across!"—'tis a matter of grief,
 His passion for swearing was past belief—

"But rend my vitals! I've ne'er been afloat
In any vile cockleshell tub of a boat.
And fire my fetlocks! 'tis nothing I know
Of the ways of the sea in its ebb or flow.
Now Charlie my King—and strike me blind!
I pray God guard his body and mind—
Has expressed his royal desire to me
That I should command a ship on the sea.
His word is my law by night or by day,
Not mine to cavil or disobey.
Of ships I know naught, but cannot surmise
In their biting or bending a mystery lies.
I shall ride my ship as I ride my horse,
Straight for the fence by the shortest course,
And the rule I shall follow is, 'Ride for the foe!
Shock him, and knock him, and take him in tow!'"
So listen, Sir Monk, to your king's behest,
And of all your cockleshells give me the best.
And as belted knight 'tis mine to lead
The British battle line,
For none of your shipmen can compare
In their beggarly rank to mine.
No doubt you can, if you will, refuse,
But 'tis this if ye do, and I bid ye choose."

And Sir John touched his sword with a "Strike
me dumb!
Here's a quiet side street, if ye care to come."

Old Monk he chuckled loud with glee,
And, "Gad!" he cried, "you're the man for me,

Of the fighting sort with the ready blow.

On the sea 'tis our golden rule,

'Knock 'em and shock 'em and take 'em in tow.'

All else is the work of a fool."

And so on that morn when fold by fold
The storm rack up from the Channel rolled,
The "Heart's Delight" led the British van,
Commander Jack Malvern, the riding man,
The Master of Hounds, who'd ne'er been afloat
In any vile cockleshell tub of a boat.

The Dutch drew out from the low French shore,
A hundred ships and something more,
With Tromp and De Ruyter in command,
Stern of heart and heavy of hand.
And ready to fight us shot for shot,
And to give as good as ever they got.
And we had but sixty. "What care we,"
Old Monk had cried, "bold lads of the sea?
Ours the weather gauge. Let the wind hold true,
We'll teach the fat Dutchmen a lesson or two."

The waves crisped white to the roaring blast,
Which swelled each sail and bent each mast.
The decks heeled o'er till the mainyard dipped,
And the hold was awash with the seas we shipped.

Sir John clung tight to the quarter-rail.
His breath came short and his cheeks were pale,
As he cried, "Odds truth! the bucking jade,
She's a cross-grained devil as ever was made."

Then Master Mariner Reuben Wright,
Mate of the battleship "Heart's Delight,"
Big Ben, who stood up six foot four,
With shoulders as wide as a chancel door,
He turned his quid to hide his grin,
And he said, "The tide is running like sin.
We shall have, Sir John, a bit of a blow,
So take my advice and go below."

When, "Spavin my hocks!" the little man cried,
"Is a sailor fool to be my guide?
How dare you utter the faintest ghost
Of a hint I should leave the danger post?
I cannot eat nor drink nor swallow,
And I feel like an empty barrel hollow.
My eyes are yellow as minted gold,
My head is dizzy, my belly's cold,
And this tub of yours is a graceless fiend,
As mad a wild colt as ever was weaned.
But what care I? 'Tis the View Halloo,
And here in the saddle I stick like glue."

He drew himself up, did the little knight,
With Reuben's help, to his fullest height.
"Edge up," he said, "a bit on the near,
And give her the whip and spurs, d'ye hear?"

When, "Port your helm!" Big Ben gave a shout,
"And shake all the reefs in the mainsail out!"
Then he grumbled, "A reprimand? By the Lord!
Let the masts bend in two till they go by the
board,

But I'll show the landlubber a lad of the sea
Is worth ten infants sick as he."

The big ship shuddered and groaned with the
press
Of the spread of sail in the storm wind's stress.

The round Dutch bottoms swiftly neared,
And again Big Ben growled deep in his beard,
"The Dutchmen have drunk too free a dram
In their dingy pothouses of Amsterdam.
Their ships are huddled like ducks in a yard,
And, the Channel in spate, the odds will go hard
But old Monk will give them the royallest basting
The burghers fat have ever been tasting."

Sir John's voice rose in a clamour shrill,
"You may stap my liver fit to kill!
My eyes are like a dog's with the mange,
Yet I swear the beggars are in our range."

Without a word Big Ben leaped down,
And ran to the chaser long and brown.
He slewed the gun and held it steady,
While Black Sam stood with the port fire ready.
The cannon roared and the splinters flew
From the nearest Dutchman clear to view.
Sir John yelled loud with a rapturous cry,
"Right plump in his ribs, Lord burn me dry!
Give him a broadside, shell and shot!
Oh, strike me senseless! give it him hot!"

In a long black line the British ships
Swept down upon the foe,
And our cannon from their iron lips
Breathed death and overthrow.
The Deutschers could give but a feeble reply
To the deadly hurricane sweeping by.
They were two to our one, but their ships were
packed,
And helpless plunged on the lee,
While the hail of our iron never slackened,
As to windward we ran free.

It seemed the death storm would never abate,
As ship after ship poured in the weight
Of her broadside, big with direful fate.
Their scuppers ran with a gruesome brew,
Their hulls were riddled through and through,
And the might of Holland reeled on the brine
To the staggering shock of the British line.

And head of them all sped the "Heart's Delight,"
Commander Jack Malvern, belted knight.
His men were stripped to the waist as they
worked,
And never a laggard was there who shirked.
Their bodies were black with powder and sweat,
And their feet with a redder stain were wet.
And Big Ben, striding from gun to gun,
Took heed that the task was truly done.

"Load and ram with might and main !
Fire and sponge her and load again !"

And above, Sir John, the riding man,
 Swore as only a trooper can.
 His stream of oaths flowed a rushing tide,
 Ready and varied and deep and wide.

In a pause of the gale Big Ben glanced back
 To the rolling ships on the following track,
 And at once he climbed to where his chief
 Was coughing and swearing past belief.

And cried, "The Admiral signals clear

'Bout ship on the starboard tack.'"

"Do you mean," Sir John asked, "come round
 on the near,

And gallop the filly back?

Is the man a dolt to spoil our fun,

When the sport has scarcely well begun?"

The mate pointed forrard. "There lies the shore,
 Where the breakers roll. You can hear them
 roar.

If we hold this course we shall run aground,
 And then the Lord help us! We're devilward
 bound."

"Gadzooks!" cried Sir John. "I could ne'er ride
 to rocks.

So, steady and spin the mare round on her
 hocks!"

Our ships like Titans upon parade
 Swung about all together as old Monk bade,

And standing down on the starboard tack,
 Again they dealt out ruin and rack,
 As ship followed ship and their broadsides roared,
 And the iron hail in a cataract poured.

Sir John rubbed his eyes and stared ahead,
 Then shouted with wrath, "May the fates strike
 me dead !

Do my bilious eyeballs see aright ?
 That I, Sir John Malvern, belted knight,
 And riding my ship as I would my horse,
 Must bring up the rear on the homeward course ?
 Must lag at the tail as we come down the straight,
 While every vile cockleshell goes on in state ?"

"Admiral's orders," Big Ben made reply.
 But the Master of Hounds prayed to instantly
 die

If he would allow any sailing man
 To give him the go-by in leading the van.
 "Enough!" he cried. "'Tis a villainous deed.
 I never will follow another man's lead.
 Pull her round on the off and give her the whip,
 And gallop her straight for De Ruyter's ship.
 For an insult I cannot and will not swallow.
 If I cannot lead, choke me blue! I won't
 follow.

Big Ben gave a gasp and his face went blank.
 "If we leave the line, it is mutiny rank."

"I'll mutiny you if you don't obey,"
 Sir John sang out in his piping way.
 He drew his sword and his face was stern,
 And his eyes like coals 'gan to flicker and burn.

Big Ben gave a shrug, and 'neath his breath
 He muttered, "Good Lord! it is certain death.
 I'm fond of a scrap on the open sea,
 So the odds are fair, but this beats me.
 I freely own he's the better man.
 I've ne'er seen a better since life began."

Then, "Starboard your helm!" his great voice
 roared,

"And let her run with the wind!"
 And at once the great ship fell away,
 And the billows rushed surging behind.
 Straight for the Dutchman's central might
 Went the British battleship, "Heart's Delight,"
 With sails all set through the war cloud's gloom,
 Swift and proud to her certain doom.

Crash! and the "Heart's Delight's" towering prow
 Struck the nearest Dutchman's rounded bow,
 Cut him down to the water line,
 Trod him under in the brine,
 Staggered a moment in recoil,
 Then onward swept through the wild turmoil.

Down in a welter of swirling wave
 Sank the big Dutchman to his grave,
 While the welkin rang to the frenzied cry
 Of three hundred souls in their agony.

But alas ! alas for the "Heart's Delight" !
 Grievous now is her perilous plight.
 In front and rear and on either hand
 The furious foe determined stand,
 And mad at the insult to their pride,
 They hem her in on every side.
 The billows of cloud by the guns are lit
 With the sulphurous gleam of that dark pit
 Where fiends in torment for ever flit.
 The cannon spout their spurts of fire
 In torrents of desolation dire.
 Their thunder outroars Heaven's mighty sound,
 And quells the ire of the deep profound,
 As if the wrath of men below
 Could even Almighty God o'erthrow.

The "Heart's Delight" is naught but a wreck.
 A shambles red is her broken deck.
 Her masts are tottering, her rigging torn,
 Her sides are sorely rent,
 And heavy she rolls like a thing forlorn,
 Whose life is nearly spent.

A third of her men are dying or dead,
 But the rest with courage stern,
 Which knows no fear nor allows defeat,
 And failure cannot learn,
 Aye ready at death to make a mock,
 All bulldogs of the British stock,
 They worked their guns with a frenzied zeal,
 Careless of wounds or woe or weal,

Till the sweat ran down to the decks like rain
And mingled there with the deeper stain.

And up and down Big Reuben strode,
Urging them ever to fire and load,
With rally and jest and cheery laugh,
Though his head was bound with a bloody scarf,
And his voice was sunk to the husky growl
Of a questing lion when out on the prowl.

And shrilly through the cannon's roar
Sir John above on the quarter-deck swore.
"Oh, split me lengthwise! In you go!
Whoop! Forrard, my beauties! Tally-ho!"

And then in a breath a silence falls,
And the Dutch hold their fire in the gloom,
While out from the rolling sulphurous walls
A ship is seen to loom.

A single shape it springs to view,
Black, silent, threatening, and never a crew—
Just a storm-beat hulk, with a broken mast,
Whence hang the grapnels tethered fast.

"What jest is this?" Sir John pipes out.
"A fireship," is Reuben's answering shout,
"A true Dutch joke, and its witty moral
Puts speedy end to our hapless quarrel."

She drove with the wind and when she struck
A man from his hiding dashed,
And cut the grapnels with an axe
Till over the side they clashed.

The iron teeth with deadly grip,
Stuck deep into the fated ship,
And on the instant fire burst forth
Like a flaming volcano in its wrath,
Till our ship with the lurid light o'ercast,
To a burning hell was anchored fast.

"Stand clear!" cried Ben, "and give me room!"

And he ran across the deck,
And leaped o'er the chasm between the ships
To the rail of the fiery wreck.
The man with the axe he seized by the throat,
And with his own weapon the villain smote.
Then he hewed at the chains which the grapnels held,
Till the iron was rent in two.

"Pay her off down the wind!" to the helmsman
he yelled,

And away the good ship drew.
The chasm widened. Again he sprang.
God's truth! 'twas a giant's leap,
But 'twas death to stay, and he knew it well,
As he put forth all his strength and fell
On our deck in a tumbled heap.
His coat was ablaze, his eyebrows seared,
And singed and burnt were his hair and beard,
But in brine and blood we rolled him round,
Till he stood up gasping yet safe and sound.

Of a sudden a seaman shouted, "Fire!"
And we saw wild streamers soaring higher,
Long flames which, driven by the gale,
Leapt swift from flapping sail to sail.

The British tars of the "Heart's Delight"
Had stubbornly fought their hopeless fight,
Had stood to their guns and taken no heed
That a cruel death was their only meed.

But a glance at that overhead world of flame
With a sudden panic their hearts o'ercame.
Strange that hearts one moment like steel,
The next a cowardly tremour should feel.
They left their guns, their wounded and dead,
And ran to the sides with a yell of dread.
And many leapt into the raging wave,
In the hope their wretched lives to save.

Then Sir John whipped out his sword and cried,
"By the body of Moses, get back from the side!
Or I'll spit every one of your mothers' sons.
The half of you back and man the guns,
And the rest form a line and hand up the water,
Or I'll hand you along to instant slaughter."

But as he spoke, a fiery spar
Fell from aloft like a shooting star,
And broke his leg close up to the thigh,
And down Sir John fell with a ghastly cry.
Big Ben picked him up, but he cried, "Let be!
Prop me up on a rail! Never mind about me!
But hurry and get the fools back to their work,
And kill any slacker who offers to shirk."

Then Reuben placed him the mainmast near,
And ran to the men who were wild with fear.

"Bully boys," he roared, "you are not such swabs
 As to leave the 'Heart's Delight,'
 The good old ship you have fought so long
 'Gainst the whole of the Dutchman's might.
 And for what? Can you live in that raging tide?
 Then aloft the fire to quench.
 If not, I swear by Him who died
 I'll slay the first that blench."
 And he lifted Black Sam and the boatswain stout,
 As if they were light as a feather,
 And he squeezed the breath from their bodies out,
 And he banged their heads together.

And at once the men forgot their fears,
 And laughing, answered with ringing cheers,
 "Get back! Big Ben has a gentle way
 Would persuade the devil himself to stay."

They formed a line and the buckets passed
 From hand to hand and mast to mast,
 They cut the sails and hacked the spars
 With the reckless dash of British tars,
 Till the fire was quenched, and black and bare
 The masts stood up in their gaunt despair,
 Once more the cannon began to boom
 On the foe, seen dimly through the gloom,
 And the Dutch replied with a hurricane fell
 Of red-hot shot and bursting shell.

Then silence again. The "Heart's Delight"
 Lies still against the coming night,

A prey to ruin red and grim,
 A miracle she yet can swim.
 And of her crew scarce fifty stand
 To work the guns with weary hand.
 And most of these are wounded sore,
 All red with their own and others' gore.

Big Ben still strives to urge them on,
 But his stride is a lurch and his voice is gone.
 Sir John sits propped by the quarter rail.
 His dull eyes tell a sorrowful tale,
 And the oaths he whispers have lost their sting,
 As his voice has lost its piping ring.

Again a ship looms out of the cloud,
 And a man through a speaking-tube roars out loud,
 "Will you haul your flag? Have you had enough?
 Do you want any more of our Dutch plum-
 duff?"

"What's that he says?" Jack Malvern cries.

"Will we haul our flag," Big Ben replies,
 In a whisper hoarse as a dying crow's.

"Will we haul our flag?" Sir John arose,
 And clung to the rail, though he gave a groan
 When his broken leg swung loose on the bone.
 "What shot have we left?"

And Reuben replied,
 "About the half of one broadside."

"Then God forbid our flag we haul
 With a shot in our locker! Send him a call!
 And give him a minute as warning fair,
 Before his fool ship we blow into air."

Black Sam seized the trumpet, and uttered a cry,
 "De Capen him answer, 'We nebber say die.'
 Him gib you one minute to get away clar,
 Den him blow you skyhigh to de oberdar."

In derision the Dutchman fired a gun,
 And the ball through the rigging humming spun.
 Cried Sir John from where on the rail he leant,
 "The base Dutch dog is impertinent.
 'Tis our very last flutter. Quick, my men!
 Fire every last shot!" and whispered Big Ben,
 "Down with the nozzles! Aim, aim low
 At his water line, a knock-out blow!"

The last half-broadside thunders loud
 At a biscuit's throw on the Dutchman proud.
 A dozen holes gape in his water line,
 And over he heels in the rushing brine
 Staggers and sinks, hull, spars, and mast,
 While his mates around look on aghast.

And at once they reopened their cannonade,
 And there in the deathcloud dank,
 The "Heart's Delight" gave a shiver and roll,
 As gently down she sank.
 Down she sank in the tempest's roar,
 Down to the ocean's wreck-strewn floor,

And carried with her through the eddying wave
 The gallant hearts of the warriors brave
 Who had fought for England their hopeless fight
 Against the full force of the Dutchman's might.

II

NEXT morn they were found by a fishing boat,
 Two half-drowned men on a spar afloat.
 Big Reuben's arms were round his chief,
 As a mother's around her child,
 And these alone of the good ship's crew
 Were alive on the waters wild.
 They were rowed to shore and tended with care,
 Till at last they opened their eyes,
 And slowly death was forced to yield
 All grudgingly his prize.

A week or two and Reuben Wright
 Was again the burly man of might
 Who had ruled as mate of the "Heart's Delight."
 And old Monk promoted him there and then
 To command a ship of the line.
 And the tale has oft been told by men
 Of the wondrous deeds of Captain Ben
 Which he did on the stormy brine.

The months were long and dragged full slow
 Ere Sir John rose up from his bed of woe.
 He limped on one leg, but stoutly swore

You might stap his vitals and shed his gore,
And consign his body as food for the worm,
But he never felt better, nor rode more firm.

Then Admiral Monk in state rode down
To Malvern Hall by Malvern Town,
And he thanked Sir John in the name of the King
For his courage against the foe,
And, "When would Sir John be ready again
To command a ship on the rolling main,
And to strike another blow?"
"You can pick your ship. You're the man for me.
With a dozen like you, I would sweep the sea."

But Sir John replied, "Sir Admiral Monk,
I pray my sides may be riven,
But I thought to pink your breast with my sword
For the deadly insult given,
When I, Sir John Malvern, belted knight,
Was cheated of my manifest right,
And every low-born sailing man
Did give me the go-by in leading the van.
But I pass it by as an oversight,
And due to the heat and hurry of fight.

"But as for commanding a ship again
On that God-forsaken, tossing main,
I have done it once, and my inmost soul
I felt I had voided, intact and whole.
I never before had occasion to see
How empty a human body can be.

I broke my leg, and a long dark night
I spent in the sea in perilous plight ;
And I never before had occasion to think
Of the ocean of water a man can drink.

"I love my King and him I will serve
 With devoted heart and hand,
But never again on the heaving main.
 It must be on solid land.
My King may command, or deign to implore,
 And you, Sir Monk, may bend your knee,
I never will leave my native shore
 To sail again on the tipsy sea.

"You may split me slanting, across, or lengthwise,
You may ravage my vitals or blast my eyes,
You may strike me senseless, without and within,
But this I swear, while the world doth spin
That never again will I go afloat
In any damn cockleshell tub of a boat."

BULLY BILLY RUMBELOW

(Song by Jack Hawser, A.B.)

WHEN Jimmy the First was ruling the land,
The King of the French wished to do the grand.
So he sent Jim a letter, with "How d'ye do?
And I'm sending a Dook with a message for
you."

Then Jimmy he asked, as he cocked his Scotch
cap,

"Now who shall we send to welcome the chap?"
When his Admiral cried, "The best man I know
Is Bully Billy Rumbelow."

Chorus

This is the song of Rumbelow,
Bully Billy Rumbelow.

Broad in the beam and big in the bows,
Rum he could drink to float a house.

Fill your mug to a roaring rouse!
Here's to old Billy Rumbelow!

So Billy he sailed in his barque, the "Tom Tit,"
With sails swelling out as if they would split,

And ten knots out from the old port of Dover,
He met the big French ship acoming straight
over.

Then up he sails in the tiny "Tom Tit,"
And there on the deck he had almost a fit,
For the Frenchie sailed with his flag at the main,
And the devil a dip in his proud disdain.

Bully Billy he hoisted his nether sheet,
And the words he said would befog a fleet,
Then he cried, "The lubbers! they don't seem to
know

That England's the Cock of the Walk here below.
A lesson in manners, it can't do no harm,
And we've pills in the hold that work like a
charm.

But first we're bound to be extra perlite,
After which the Lord help them, we'll make 'em
sit tight!"

So he runs up to Mossoo, and he sings out, "Bong
swore!"

And, "Commong voo portay voo? Bokoo!
Angcore!

I've been sent by King Jimmy to welcome ye
over,

And bring ye along to the white cliffs of Dover."
Then the Dook he stands out in his best toggeree,
And he smirks and he smiles to our Bully Billee.
And, "Tankye," he says, "Rosbif, and Goddam.
L'Ambassador Royal is zat vot I am."

Then Bill turns his quid and he says, says he,
 "We've been as perlite as perlite can be.

Now look here, Mossoo Dook, your flag you must
 dip,

Or you'll get into trouble, so none of your lip."

But the Dook he frowns, and says, "Vot is zis
 talk?"

And Billy explains, "We are Cock of the Walk."

But Mossoo says, "Non! You are poking ze fun.

Le Roi de belle France he is second to none."

"Very good," says old Bill. "Then don't blame
 me!

I've give you a warning as fair as can be."

The "Tom Tit" turned ere a man could cry,
 "What,"

And poured in a broadside hot and hot.

Then she crossed his bows, did the tiny craft,

And raked the big Frenchie fore and aft,

And again she swung with her scuppers under,

While her guns on the starboard roared like
 thunder.

The Dook tore his hair on the quarter deck,

As he looked at his vessel gone all to wreck,

When Billy sang out, "Do you want Number
 Four?

Just say but the word. We have lots of them
 more."

"Non, non!" Mossoo cried, "Ve 'ave 'ad bokoo
 tro.

I vill do vat you vish, Mistare Rumblebelow."
He tried for to grin, but it looked like a frown,
As he waved his hand and the flag fluttered
down.

"That's right," says brave Billy. "I'm glad you
agree

To acknowledge Old England as Cock of the Sea.
But if you have still the shadow of doubt,
We are willing to argue the matter right out.
And now let us put to the ruction an end,
And look upon each as a sworn bosom friend.
They've got tea and s'rimps and some grog down
at Dover,
Awaiting for you, so come along over."

Chorus

This is the song of Rumbelow,
Bully Billy Rumbelow,
Broad in the beam and big in the bows.
Rum he could drink to float a house.
Fill your mug to a farewell rouse!
Here's to old Billy Rumbelow!

BRETHREN TWAIN

ON his canvas the artist drew
A man in a huge cocked hat,
With a big pale face and a figure bent
That was getting decidedly fat,
But with terrible eyes which pierced
Each man to his bosom's core.
And the nations saw it and groaned,
"Behold! 'tis the Genius of War."

And behind him the artist limned
A shape with the face of a skull,
And a grin on his mumbling jaws,
And eye-sockets balefully dull,
With a sickle in his hand ;
And the nations held their breath,
And whispered with fluttering lips,
"Behold ! 'tis the Angel of Death."

And I cried, "My artist friend,
What does thy picture mean ?
Why is the man with the big pale face
Aye dogged by the death's head lean ?"
But the artist in answer laughed,
And mocking was his speech.
"The matter is plain. They are brethren twain,
A bony party each."

THE OLD MAJOR

POOR Major Jones was very bald.

His head without a hair
Shone snowy as the Matterhorn,
Or alabaster rare.

He had a wife and children ten,
And each day found it harder
To keep sufficient, full supply
Of forage in the larder.

He'd fought in battles by the score,
Of steel his nerves were made.
His bald head ever went the first
In charge or escalade.

But for he had no interest
And scorned to climb backstairs,
Promotion left him in the lurch,
Just like his faithless hairs.

So in the British Army List,
He was the oldest Major,
And dandy subs they sneered at him,
An ancient, seedy stager.

One day, my lord the C.-in-C.,
Commander of the Forces,
Was dining with our regiment
On several toothsome courses,

And as the wine flowed ruby red,
And warmed his noble bones,
He thought to try his genial wit
On poor old Major Jones.

“Good Major Jones,” his lordship cried,
In his delightful way,
“Your baldness is a miracle.
Now, what’s the reason, pray?”

“Why I am bald the reason’s plain,”
The Major coolly said.
“Because my juniors have for long
Been stepping o’er my head.”

THE ANGEL AND THE CROWN

I MARKED as in the tale of yore
An old man scraping with a rake
In heaps of refuse by his door.

An angel bending bid him take
The golden crown he held on high,
And pointing to the effulgent sky,

“Look up, my son, look up,” he cried,
“To golden sky and golden crown,
A fuller life, more large and wide.”

The old man answered with a frown,
“I wish you’d stop your silly shouts.
I’ve lost a penny hereabouts.”

I saw a housewife full of care,
And troubled how to meet both ends.
In hats and dress her daily prayer
To raise the envy of her friends.
With butcher, bread, and milk accounts,
Great Heavens! how the balance mounts!

“Look up, my child,” the angel cried,
“To higher thought and nobler wish.
The world above is fair and wide.”
She gave a little scornful “Pish!

Seven times she has been 'overtook.'
She's no teetotaller is that cook."

I knew a man both tall and strong,
Who played at golf from morn to eve.
His temper short, his driver long,
His language would a caddy grieve.
His mind was filled with foolish fancies
Of "grips" and "follow throughs" and "stances."

"What will you do?" the angel cried,
"When the old man plays his game with you?
Look up, my son, the world is wide."
He only growled, "What would I do?
"Send him to . . . ahem! below, without a
punkah.
I caught him teeing in a bunker."

A boy and girl were newly wed.
The livelong day they billed and cooed.
Their path with blushing roses red
Fragrant with love was thickly strewed.
His world, the wonder in her eyes.
His heart, her earthly paradise.

The angel smiled "The crown is yours.
No world so wide as Love's dear land.
For you he opens heavenly doors."
She only pressed her husband's hand.
"I wish this bird would fly away.
I have so many things to say."

BARNEY O'TOOLE

WHEN Sister Agatha went to Guy's
To visit the children's ward,
A boy's shrill voice from a corner cried,
"Shure I prayed for this to Him who died,
And He's answered, the Blessed Lord.

"Ye're a Catholic, Miss. I see by the Cross.
Will ye sit and talk awhile?
For the rest are all Protestants. Well I know
They're bound for a mighty hot climate below,
Where the fires are kept up in style."

"I'm a Sister of Charity, my poor child."
The little form rose in bed.
"Are ye Faith or Hope? I am sure ye are Hope,
But ye can't guess why, by the Holy Pope."
The Sister shook her head.

"Ye are wearing a cape, the Cape of Good Hope,"
The urchin laughed with glee.
But anon he sighed and his little face fell.
"It's a very old joke, shure ye know it well.
It never was made by me."

"But what is your name?" Sister Agatha asked.

"You're a very merry lad."

"An orphan, Miss. I am Barney O'Toole,
And the neighbours say that in playing the fool
I drive them almost mad.

"It's a fault I have that I love a jest,
Indeed I do, most dearly.

When I read all the jokes in the comical papers,
I feel like a divil acutting his capers,
They make me feel so queerly.

"And hundreds I know, and I fire them off
On every chance I can,
But I've never made one of my very own,
For whenever I try, my head's like a stone,
And my brain like a warming pan.

"There's 'Cough' and 'Coffin.' All the night long
I thought till my head 'gan to ache.
I'm sure there's a good joke hidden somewhere,
But I scratched my head and tugged my hair,
Yet never a one could I make.

"It bothers me, Miss, but perhaps one day
I shall make a joke of my own,
Signed, 'Barney O'Toole,' a real tit-bit,
And the folks they will read and their sides will
split,
And with laughter they will groan.

"Bejabers ! mile high in the seventh heaven

With joy I will be half crazy.

No more will it be, 'Get out, you young fool !'

But, 'The top of the morning, Misther O'Toole !

And I hopes as I finds ye aisy.'"

A nurse came up and said, "Little Barney,

Your talking will make you worse.

It is time for your plaster. Lie down and keep still.

No good little boy ever wants to be ill,

And he always obeys his nurse."

The nurse put the mustard plaster on,

While Agatha soothed his head.

He winked, "What a lot of mustard to eat

With such a scraggy bit of meat!—

Not mine. Tom Hood's," he said.

Then Agatha drew the nurse aside.

"What ails him and who is he ? "

"He's a newspaper boy," the nurse replied.

"Consumption is killing the life inside.

He will die, all the doctors agree."

The quick ears caught the ominous word.

"Die ? Not a bit, and what's more,

I am sure it is the very last thing I shall do.

Not mine. Old Pam's." The eyeballs grew

Large with the pain he bore.

"He's the funniest boy that ever was seen,"

The nurse said under her breath.

"He keeps all the children aquake with his fun.

His stories and jokes they'll never be done,

Till his lips are closed by death."

He signed with his hand, and Agatha bent

Over the thin white face.

The pale lips whispered, "I'm stony broke.

I'm going to die, in spite of the joke.

I know all about my case.

"Will ye do, Good Hope, what a poor boy begs?

I'm sorry to trouble ye so.

But I know of a right good rattling jest.

It will make ye laugh. It is one of the best,

But who made it I don't know.

"And I think if ye wrote it upon a card,

And stuck it above my grave,

Some folks might read it and think it was mine.

Begob! I would grin. 'Twould be mighty fine.

My very own joke, by your lave."

Then he pulls her head down close to his lips,

And whispers it in her ear,

And crows with delight, but the Sister's eyes

Are blurred, and unsteady the voice that replies,

"I'll do it, Barney dear."

“Good-bye, Good Hope. You won't forget?
Good-bye and come again!”

Then Agatha signed the cross in the air,
And kneeling down, she breathed a prayer
For the sick who suffer pain.

And in a week after Agatha placed
A card on a little green mound,
In the close-cut grass with never a weed,
And this was the legend which all might read,
In letters large and round—

“Such a beautiful cemetery never was seen :
To get here the folks are just dying.”
And a bird flew by with a chuckle bright
As the happy laugh of the merry wight
Who under the sod was lying.

“Good-bye, little Barney,” then Agatha said,
“Your body here doth lie,
But your laughing soul has taken flight
To your heaven of joy and all delight.
Good-bye, little Barney, good-bye!”

PADDY O'CONNOR

WHEN Wellin'ton beat the French from Spain,
And their moultin' eagles were more than fain
To hop back quick to the Bordeaux plain, -
His right-hand man was Paddy O'Connor.

The Duke gave him all the credit,
And owned without Pat he'd have been but a goner.
'Twas Paddy himself that said it.

This hero was born by the banks of the Shannon,
And he aye had a taste for the music of cannon.
So he went for a soldier and took the King's
shillin',
And started away with a mind mighty willin'
To engage in the game of be kilt or be killin'.

As private bold in the Eighty Second
He marched where the finger of glory beckoned.
Sure he was the broth of a fighting man,
And his brogue you could cut in the front of the
van.

The victory indeed was easy to get
If Paddy was there with his bayonet.
Faith! the generals and colonels had little to do,
When Paddy was asked to put the thing through.

But do what he would, and go where he shouldn't,
And fight as he could, and run as he wouldn't,
The divil's own luck seemed doggin' the boy,
And doin' its best himself to destroy.
For never a battle the poor lad was wagin',
And never a skirmish did he engage in,
But he fell a victim to Fortune's whims,
And suffered some pain in his body or limbs.

At Salamanca he lost an eye,
And was chipped in both his knees.
At Torres Vedras a finger or two,
And his teeth in the Pyrenees.
Vittoria saw him minus his nose,
And at Talavera, to add to his woes,
And to show how fate does nothing by halves,
He lost his toes and both his calves.

In fact, from end to end of Spain
There was scarcely a hill or valley or plain
Where a monument was not erected in honour
To some fragment or other of Paddy O'Connor.

But the brave-hearted boy he cared not a jot
For the dreadful blows of his infamous lot,
And he always was ready his fun to poke
About his woes to the soldier folk.
When his nose was shot, "No matter of grief,"
He cried, "Begob! 'tis a great relief,
Now I need not borrow a handkerchief."

His scalp he lost in the Lisbon harbour.

“That saves tuppence a month to the company’s barber.”

His eye you might think was a very great loss.

It was gettin’, he said, to squint across,

And was puttin’ on him the black disgrace.

He would get one of glass to take its place,

A jewel of joy in his illigant face.

So wherever he went the ranks were all laughin’,

For he never was done with his chat and his chaffin’.

Though cruel and bitter was Fortune’s cup,

The O’Connor would never climb down nor give up.

And however severely his courage was tested,

He never would own to its bein’ bested.

But at last it all to a crisis drew,

When the Duke met Bony at Waterloo.

“Tis death or victory this day, by the Powers,”

Says Paddy as bold as can be.

“I’ve been dying by inches for five long years,

And there’s nothin’ worth havin’ on me.

If Death, the old skamer, is tryin’ a fall,

He must give me the go-by, or take my poor all.”

That day the Frenchies they did what they could,

But Paddy was there and the red line stood.

Then Paddy advanced like a roarin’ lion,

And with him the army, all yellin’ and cryin’,

And the Frenchies at once began for to run

At the terrible sight, and the battle was won.

But Fortune, the jade, would never forgive
 Poor Pat all his jokin' and folly,
And just as the tide of victory turned,
 He fell to a murderous volley.

They found him beside a cannon lyin',
But still the gossoon to chuckle was tryin'.
"Shure ! Death, the curmudgeon, should be mighty
 merry
With three score bites to this small Irish cherry.
I shall find the blue heaven a blessed release is.
Take care how you lift me ! I'm comin' to pieces."

They took him along to the hospital tent,
Though they saw in a jiff that his life it was spent.
And never a bone did they find in him whole,
So they sent for a priest to pray for his soul.

Then Father O'Gorman he did what was needed,
And the partin' soul on its long journey speeded.
"Listen, my son, to what Scripture saith,
" 'The Good God loves whom He chasteneth.' "

The wan lips smiled and the eye twinkled bright.
"Ye're speakin' the truth, Holy Father, this night,
And I think I'm a bit of a favourite."

Then he laughed and turned on his wounded side,
But fell back soon, and laughin' died.

WOOLLY JAKE

“DE power ob prayer, dear childers,”
Said de good ole Aunty Loo,
From her nook in de chimley corner,
When we all roun’ de big fire drew,
“De power ob prayer am wonnerful.
It most always do de trick.
If Satan wid his larks am knockin’ out de sparks,
Just you pray, and he’ll skim away quick.

“Way down in Louisianny
Am de place whar I was riz,
Whar de boss was Massa Johnson,
And de cotton was de biz.
A sassy young slip was I,
Wid a sweetheart, Woolly Jake,
Who was ready to shed ebery drop in his head,
And all for my true lub’s sake.

“I was a gal ob ten,
And he had just gone eight,
And de both ob us cooed like turtles,
In a frightful lubsick state.

You take it from me, honies,
De lub of gals and boys,
Like de sun in de morn on de golden corn,
Am de brightest and best ob our joys.

“Den Jake he got took wid religion,
And wished to be born again,
Wid a soul like a little white lamb
That hab just been washed by de rain.
He 'lowed he was full up wid sin,
And dat for a chicken ob eight,
Twas a terrible woe to go down below,
Far away from de pearly gate.

“But, Lawks! a passel ob nonsense
It all did seem to be.
I didn't want Jake no whiter,
He was white enough for me.
But Jake he groaned and sighed,
'To de debbil you will belong.
You ain't as good as you oughter should.'
And I aint berry sure he was wrong.

“He wished to pray a bit,
But nebber a prayer he knew.
So he went whar a reberend preacher
Was preachin' to his crew.
And he listened wid all his might,
But dat Reberend roared so loud,
He couldn't understan' what de matter was in han',
And no more could de whole blame crowd.

“He caught de halb ob a prayer,
And de preacher he hear him roar,
‘Just say dat when you in trouble,
And your trouble will scoot eber more.’
‘What is dat?’ I asked, but Jake
He grinned like a tabby cat.
‘De trouble ain’t come. Till it do we keep mum.
No use wastin’ a good prayer like dat.’

“It was a heathen place,
Dat Massa Johnson’s farm,
A school whar all de debbils
Taught ebbery kind ob harm.
But nebber a prayer nor a hymn.
Just cussin’ all de day,
And gamblin’ and swearin’ and drinkin’ and
tearin’,
In a puffickly scandalous way.

“It was den de war ob secession,
And de fightin’ was all about,
And one day a Federal troop
From de wood came ridin’ out.
You should hab seen dem niggahs,
Wid Massa leadin’ de fun.
Two skips and a jump and dey landed out plump
In de State dat was next but one.

“For dem troopers were all right mad.
Dey’d been shot at from de trees,
And de soldier hates bushwhackin’,
As he hates a mean disease.

He'll fight you on de squar,
And enjoy de holiday scamper,
But a shot in de back on a lonely track
Am a dreary sort ob damper.

"We hid behind de barn
Whar Massa kept his colt,
But de troopers dey smelt us out,
And I started to make a bolt.
Den Jake cry out, 'Hold on!
And I'll see if dat prayer am good.'
'But,' says I, 'better hurry! You can pray as
we scurry,'
And we ran like hares for de wood.

"But 'twarn't no manner ob use.
Dey cotched us mighty quick,
And de Capen he up wid his lash,
And gabe poor Jake a flick.
And he say, 'Jes string him up,
De picaninny viper!
And gib him a score ob de best on de raw!
We'll make him pay de piper.'

"Den Jake he flops down quick,
As de long lash o'er him hisses,
And he cry: 'Dear Lord, forgib
Me all my precipices,
And lead us not, dear Lord,
Into de ole plantation;
And dat is all I know, but, Lord, Dy mercy show,
As de Boss ob dis creation.'

“ But what he meant at all
I’m blest if I can tell,
But de flogger dropped his whip,
And de troopers gabe a yell.
Dat prayer was like a charm.
Dey laughed as dey would split,
And de Capen rolled aroun’ wid shrieks upon
de groun’,
As if he’d hab a fit.

“ You bet we didn’t stay,
But we lighted out from dar,
Goin’ fifty mile a minute,
Wid de whiz ob a shootin’ star.
And once I looked and still
Dey laughed like a copper bilin’,
And two hosses I could see were leanin’ on a tree,
And seemed nigh dead wid smilin’.

“ We often used dat prayer,
And it always acted so,
And ’spashially wid de white folks,
But why I sca’cely know.
It seems somehow myster’ous,
But dat’s a matter ob course.
Wid prayers and such, you don’t understan’ much,
Dey acts wid a magic force.

“ For de power ob prayer am wonnerful—
What’s dat you ask about Jake?
He grew up powerful pious,
And went north to Winnipeg Lake.

And a man called Jake out dar

Was hanged for stealin' a horse,

But I guess it warnt my Woolly, he could pray
dat bootifully.

But it might hab been, ob course."

SLOGGER SAM

WHEN Sloggah Sam lay adyin',
We sent for de Reberend Bones
To cheer him up wid some prayin'
And some friendly sort ob groans.
And de preacher he sat by de bed,
And he prayed and groaned a bit.
Den he say, "Samuel, ain't you feared ob de hell?
Do you want to be damned in de pit?"

At de sound ob de well-known words
Ole Sam he opened his eye,
But all he whispered was, "Preacher!
Don't you go for to try!
Mebbee I'm mortal sick,
But cuss words I can't stand.
You dare to cuss me, and you'll mighty quick see
I can lick you wid one hand."

De pore ole fell was awanderin',
And de berry Reberend Bones
He shook his head and raised his hands,
And gave some awful groans,

And said, "My fellow-sinner,
You do not comprehend.
You're full up wid sin from de marrow to de skin,
And you'm better get on de mend,

"Or de debbil from de pit
Will take you quick away,
And he'll boil and burn and grill you
For ebber and a day.
So listen, my pore lamb,
To de word from Hebben sent,
If you're on for a blessin', just waltz in confessin'.
Own up to your sins and repent."

Den Sam he whispered low,
As if he'd thinking bin,
"I ain't so drefful sure
I'be eber done a sin."
I had to run outside
To laugh behind de hut,
For Sloggah Sam, in Alabam
Was de toughest kind ob nut.

Den de Reberend Shepherd say,
"Hab you no told a lie?
Hab you no stole, nor kissed
A gal upon de sly?
Hab you always kept de Sabbath
From de moment ob your birth?
Or are you, Sam, de whitest lamb
In all dis mortal earth?"

Den Sam replied, "I ain't
A mean and sneakin' thief.
But as for lies, Lor' lummy!
To de best ob my belief,
I'b told a many million,
But all in de way ob trade,
What ebery man will tell if he can,
Who knows a hoe from a spade.

"And den for kissin' de gals—
Sho, a kiss it ain't no harm.
It lies on de lips like molasses
Wid a holy Sabbath calm.
And as for a kiss on de sly—
Why, Reberend, you neber bin dere.
Would you hab me gib kisses to de lubly young
misses
At noon in de public square?

"Dere was Miss Melinda Potts,
I kissed her once in de street,
And she landed me hot in de mouth,
And knocked me clar off my feet.
No, no, you take it from me,
My 'sperience it ain't small—
You may try till you die, 'tis a kiss on de sly,
Or you'll never get one at all.

"Den as for de Sabbath breakin',
Don't you hab any fear,
For ebery Sabbath day
I bin drunk for forty year.

I couldn't break de Sabbath,
Not if I wanted to,
For I sleep all de day in a peaceful way,
And as good as a babe what is new.

"No, Preacher, don't you fret!
Whatever way you take it,
I've thought, and s'elp me sho!
I ain't de man you make it.
I ain't de one to brag,
But on de thrones what shine,
Dere'll be powerful few ob dat angel crew
Will hab gowns as white as mine."

Den de berry Reberend Bones,
He say, "You s'prise me, Brudder.
Your soul I see is white
As de cow-milk from de udder.
But dere's still one ting to do.
You must forgib your foes,
And den you can skip wid a smile on your lip
To de place where de flowers eber blows."

Den dat inbalid reply,
"In de State of Alabam
For twenty years I bin
De fightin' Sloggah Sam.
I freely forgib all dose
Who banged me for dere libbin'.
And dose dat I downed in de ring on de ground,
Dey can do dere own forgibbin'.

“I freely forgib my foes,
Except dat Conky Pete,
Who hit me below de belt
At de big Ohio meet.
I bin lookin’ for dat niggah
For many a weary year,
To cure his fun wid a buckshot gun,
Dat’s why he hab travelled from here.

“Dat’s why he hab done a bunk.
Dat’s why he am lyin’ low.
I wont forgib dat niggah,
Not till I’b had my show.
I’ll choke him wid my halo
If togedder in hebben we get.
Wid my harp I’ll go to bash him,
But I’ll end up quits, you bet.”

Den de berry Reberend Shepherd,
Dat Ebenezer Bones,
He rolled his eyes and shook his head,
And gurgled wid his groans.
“If you no forgib dat niggah,
Dat trabellin’ Conky Pete,
You’ll go down wid Satan in a big fiery phaeton,
Where you don’t want no close for de heat.”

Den Sloggah Sam he whispered,
“Oh, Lordy! is dat so?
Dat alters de whole caboodle,
Makes anudder row to hoe.

If I die I do forgib him.

I guess dat's mighty fair.

But if I recubber, I warn dat ere lubber

To go out in his walks wid care."

Den de Reberend Bones he bless him,

And Sam sat up in bed,

And called for one last drink,

"Jes for ole lang syne," he said.

And what is most amazin',

De whisky cured ole Sam,

And dat is why Pete Conky fly

From de State of Alabam.

PACKMAN'S LAW

THE MINER'S TALE

MY tents were pitched in order duly
In an Oriental Ultima Thule,
Not far from Comorin's rugged Cape,
Near a village that leaves your mouth agape
With the syllables ten of an awesome name,
Which winds o'er the map like a snake that's
gone lame.

My servants I noticed were all on the grin,
And aquake with mirth without and within ;
And e'en that immaculate henchman Nubby,
Solemn of port, rotund and tubby,
Wore an oily smile on his features chubby.

The coolies, however, who lent their aid
To pitch the tents in the mango shade,
Were clearly o'erwhelmed as they went to and
fro,
With the dreadful sense of a secret woe ;
While at times they retired to tremble and weep,
With faces long and sighs that were deep.

A mystery here was plainly concealed,
So when the evening came,
Forth I strolled towards the town,
In the hope to solve the same.
And as I went, I became aware
Of a crowd of men who were seated there,
With clothing the scantiest and backs that were
bare,
A lachrymose crowd, all bare and brown,
Squatting forlorn on a knoll by the town.

And when they perceived the Feringhee* man
Come striding up the road,
At once and together that crowd began
Their hearts of their grief to unload.
They threw back their heads and rent the air
With an ululating howl of despair.

I called a man, and I had to shout,
And bade him tell what the row was about.
In answer, he pointed towards a tree,
And with quivering lips, he whispered, "See !
There they sit, the terrible two.
God knows what more they are going to do.
We are lost and ruined unless my lord
Will give the aid he alone can afford."

I followed his glance to where two men
Beside the village tank
Were lolling as if they were tired of toil,
In the shade of a sheltering bank,

* Foreigner.

The Jewish type, with the noses hooked,
The big black beards, the eyes which looked
From the shaggy brows with the steady stare
Of a beast of prey in his mountain lair,
The twisted ringlets, the turbans tied
Round the pointed cap of a Khan,
The voluminous breeches in endless fold
Showed men of Afghanistan.
Their sleeves were rolled over brawny arms,
And at each man's side a cane
Was lying handy, long and limber,
And dyed with a reddish stain.

“But what have they done?” I inquired of
my friend,
“That thus you do the welkin rend?”

His voice was hushed to a holy awe.
“They have meted upon us the Packman's Law.
They are travelling merchants. Last year they sold
A bale of cloth to Nungam old,
The agéd wheelwright of the town.
Then fever struck old Nungam down.
He died. The bale was bought on credit,
The price two hundred rupees.
And Nungam's heirs have vanished and fled,
Like the summer wind in the trees.
The terrible two came back to the day,
And to all that we said, they answered, ‘Pay!’
We explained the case in languages three,
As they sat on their bales beneath that tree,

In Telugu, English, and Canarese,
And we talked the livelong day.
But all they replied was 'Two hundred rupees !
Two hundred rupees !' and 'Pay !'

"No more of a civilized tongue they knew,
And aye we could see their anger grew.
At last they arose and took from their bales
Those canes as wicked as devils' tails,
And without further word of good or ill,
They drove us forth to this little hill ;
And while the one surrounded us there——"

"Hold !" I cried. "You are not playing fair.
How can one man surround a crowd,
Unless like a serpent he's endowed ?"

"But, Sahib," he said, "the truth I tell.
He froze our blood with a glance of hell,
And as he paced the hillock's bound,
We felt in our hearts he was all around.
And we dared not move. Then the other fiend,
He called us one by one,
And he beat us with his devil's tail,
And he grinned as enjoying the fun.
Yea, he shook with a laughter silent and grim.
Our groans and our moans were nothing to him.

"And when fifty backs had weakened his stroke,
His fellow came in to continue the joke,
And another fifty with stripes were scored
Red and blue by that tail abhorred.

And now being weary, there they sit
Like demons of the nether pit.

"God knows what more they are going to do,
For Nungam's bale cost hundreds two,
And as yet but a hundred backs do show
The weary weight of an Afghan blow."

"But why not pay the coin and be free
Of the terrible terrors under the tree?"

"Sahib, we're poor. The debt is not ours,
And a bleeding back will heal;
But money gone is gone for good,
Like the bread one eats at a meal."

"Then why not take heart and resist, ye fools?
The odds are five hundred to two."

"Resist!" he muttered. "Are we mad?
The day indeed we should rue.

Resist? They would eat us alive," and he wept,
And wringing his hands, he abjectly crept
Back to his friends in the cowardly crowd,
Who again broke forth into wailing loud.

I advanced to the Afghans, swart and burly,
Who eyed my approach with the glances surly
Of a dog who gathers himself to defend
His bone from the claims of a passing friend.
But a twinkle came in the eyes of each
When I spoke to them in the Pushtu* speech.

* The Afghan language.

And when I announced I was no star
Of the Government galaxy,
But a humble miner come from afar
To mine in a strange country,
Their suspicion relaxed, their brows lost their
frown,
And with "Salaam to Your Honour," they begged
me sit down.

And then I remembered my Omar Khayyám,
How he aye kept a jug in the shade of the
palm ;
And I straightway declared that close at hand
An elixir I had of a virtue grand,
And sent to my tent for a bottle of port,
Of an ancient, tawny, and fruity sort,
And served to each a bounteous measure
From the gurgling lips of my cobwebbed
treasure.

They quaffed it down with a hearty will,
And never a drop on the way did they spill.
Then as one old friend will speak to another,
They welcomed me as a long lost brother,
And down we sat on the sandy ground,
While the laugh and the jest went gaily round.

Then I asked in a pause of the mirth and glee,
"Pray, what is this jest ye have played so
free?"

And I pointed towards the wailing crowd
Who capped the hill like a gloomy cloud.

The packmen laughed. "It is our law.

We have meted it full and fair.

For every rupee a bleeding back.

'Tis a law without compare.

We show our stuffs and a bargain strike,

And credit give for a year.

Twelve good long months the debtor has

To pay us back our gear.

And then if he fail, we write the debt

On the backs of his friends, lest they forget

That in commerce and traffic the man who is wise

Above all things will honesty prize."

"Did they never resist?"

The packmen grinned.

"A flock of sheep are these men of Ind.

For a hundred years they have seen no war,

And long have forgotten the fighting lore

Which their fathers learned in the days of yore.

Men? Are those men? A woman weak

Would blush to bear a heart so weak.

Resist? Not they. They even fear

To lodge a complaint in the thána* here.

They know we are men, and late or soon

We will balance our debt with every poltroon."

And then with the candour which friendship brings,

We talked together on varied things.

"Surely," I said, "ye have wandered far

From the thronging marts of Kandahar."

* Police-station.

Replied the elder, Mahomed Khan,
"Five hundred leagues is Afghanistan,
And two slow years have wearily passed
Since on her hills our eyes we cast.
The trade is good and we wander wide,
And seldom long in one place abide.
Not often in truth our law we mete,
And never have cause the dose to repeat."

"Your roll of accounts must lengthy be."

"We know neither writing nor reading," said he.
"We keep no accounts. No use we find
For a book-taught pedant's learnèd mind."
He tapped his forehead. "Here I keep
My business ledgers buried deep.
Within this myriad folded book
Each figure has its special nook.
The name and place, both far and near,
Are all recorded fair and clear.
And which of your scholars will ne'er forget
One tittle of a ten-years' debt?"

"Believe me, Sahib, these pestilent schools
Turn men to weaklings and breed up fools,
And reading and writing are follies vain,
Which soften the heart and deaden the brain.
These men of Ind can read and write,
And they chatter like women day and night.
But in strength of body, mind, and will,
Can they compare to the men of the hill?"

"Howe'er that be," I said with a smile,
As I pointed to the mound the while,
"Is it permitted to one, who ne'er
To mar another's jest would dare,
To hope that penance their sin has shriven,
And that now the fools may be forgiven?"

The packman replied with a gracious bow,
"The lightest wish of a friend
Is granted freely before his lips
Of speaking have made an end.
Go, you knaves!" he shouted. "Lo!
The Sahib has asked your pardon. Go!"
And though never a word did they understand,
Upon the instant the wailing band
From the hillock's top ran swiftly down,
And incontinent rushed to the sheltering town.

The Afghan continued: "The fools are blind,
And ye Sahibs err in being too kind.
We know, we men of the mountain height,
That a Sahib is never so ready to fight
As when he words of peace doth utter,
And his gentle speech is soft as butter.
We know. We have felt the weight of his hand,
But these have forgotten, the sheep of this land.
You are gentle and kind, and your words are
sweet,
And the muttons wag their heads and bleat
That your kindness is weakness, a lambkin bold
Is a fiercer beast than a lion old.

“Our sires have told us, in ancient days
The men of the hardy north
Through our passes wild to the land of Ind
Each year went riding forth.
Every man with spear and sword
Through this land of cravens rode as lord.
None said “Nay” to the men of the hill,
Who ravaged and plundered and worked their will.

“A whisper I’ve heard, that the Sahibs soon
Will cease from a thankless toil,
And will yield the sovereignty of Ind
To the rightful sons of the soil.
Is it true what I hear? For a village I know,
Up there in the mountains beneath the snow,
Where a hundred men of the fighting stock,
With thews of iron and hearts of rock,
All armed to the teeth, would mount and ride,
Did I send one word to their bleak hillside.

“This land is rich with the wealth heaped up
By a hundred years of peace,
And easy the task from the fatted ewe
To lift the golden fleece.
Will the wine-press once more churn a devil’s brew?
Is it true what I hear! Joy of God! Is it true?”

NOTE.—The above is an Afghan view of the matter. With the exception of a small minority of warlike races, Rajput, Sikh, Mahratta, Jat, and Punjabi Mahomedan, whose courage is unquestioned and who supply our regiments with excellent fighting material, the many millions of India are peaceful labourers and agriculturists, whose condition would be parlous indeed were the mantle of British protection withdrawn.

TO BURY QUEEN MUSIC

IN the days of Aurangzeb,
Whom men called Alamgir,
In a stately hall by the Delhi wall,
To the flowing Jumna near,
Was heard the zaringa sweet,
Struck by Moussa Ramzān the Fat,
While Bulbul twirled her little pink feet
In time with a light pit-a-pat.

The Qāzi had given a feast
For the wedding of his son,
And the revel had lasted since morn
Till now when the day was done.
The wine-cup circled free
And loud was the laugh and jest,
The zaringa twanged and the cymbals banged
And Bulbul danced her best.

She languished with lovelit eyes,
She blushed like a budding rose,
And the silver bells rang to the song she sang,
As she stamped with her tiny toes,

And swayed from her lissome hips,
A vision of pure delight,
Smiling with pouting, cherry lips,
Till men went mad at the sight.

And near her her sisters twain,
The Pearl and the Dream of Desire,
Stood ready to take her place
When Bulbul's limbs should tire.
The three for their dance and song
Were famous throughout all Ind,
With voices as clear as a seraph's lute
And feet as light as the wind.

Beside old Moussa sat
His wife, the Dawn of Day,
And one was lean and the other was fat,
And both were old and grey.
The Dawn beat loud her drum,
While Smudge, the crooked man,
With monkey vault and somersault,
Tumbling, he tripped and ran.

At last to the midst of the frolic
A lordly herald strode,
Bearing the silver wand of state,
And bright his vesture glowed.
And he cried to the listening throng,
"Be silent all! Give ear
To the mandate brief of our mighty chief,
The Emperor Alamgir.

“Our God is God, and Mahomed
His Prophet of world-wide fame,
Whom all men should adore,
And praise his holy name.
Prayer and praise are good.
All else is folly and sin,
The devil’s wile the soul to beguile
And blacken the heart within.

“The song and dance and jest,
The sound of music vain
Shall through this land of saints
Be never heard again.
The wine-cups shall be broken,
On the ground the wine be poured,
For drink and the revel are lures of the devil,
By the righteous most abhorred.

“Ye have heard and, hearing, obey!”
Then a frightened silence fell,
And a wine-cup rang on the floor
With the clang of a funeral bell.
And Bulbul’s toes grew still,
And pale the round cheeks that were red,
And Smudge turned stiff with fear,
As he stood on his guilty head.

At once he regained his feet,
And, “Most puissant lord, I pray,
What pain to those would ye mete
Who by chance should disobey?”

The herald smiled serene,
And spoke with gentle breath,
"The penalty, sweet sir,
Is sure and certain death."

Then Bulbul wrung her hands,
With terror she shivered and paled,
And the Pearl and the Dream of Desire
They tore their hair and wailed,
"Alas ! we are undone,
And sorrow is ours through the years.
If song is fled and dance is dead,
What is left but a draught of tears?"

Then Moussa the Fat he growled :
"Henceforth we are beggars all.
I hate a saint with never a taint
Of peccadilloes small.
Give me the jovial sinner
Who spends his life with a zest.
But what say ye ? This mandate stern
May be naught but an idle jest."

The Dawn took up the tale,
The grey Dawn lean and old,
"This Alamgir is a man to fear,
And his heart like ice is cold.
He spends his nights in prayer,
And with fasting his body is worn,
And all our tribe who jest and gibe
He holds in utter scorn."

"Go warily, I pray,
If ye would wish to live;
For the heart of a saint is stone
That can neither forget nor forgive.
Alas! we are beggars all.
This mandate is no game.
Our lot to whine and cringe and pine
And to eat the bread of shame."

Then Smudge, the crooked man,
Whose back was bent like a bow,
Cried, "Behold! I have a plan
To ease our bitter woe.
We will build us a funeral bier,
And on it will lay the lute,
The zaringa, the drum, and the cymbals,
The trumpet and the flute."

"Poor fool!" said the Dream of Desire.
"His sorrow has turned his brain."
"Not so, not so," cried the crooked man.
"'Tis a worthy plan and sane.
By the palace wall the bier
We will carry, the while we weep.
Our cries of despair will rend the air
With lamentation deep.

"At noon the Emperor looks
From his window in the gate,
His people to see and audience give
To every small and great.

He will ask what mean our cries.

Then 'Sire,' the Dawn will say,
'We carry the corpse of Music sweet
In her final grave to lay.'

"At the witty and rare device

The Emperor will smile.

And Bulbul shall sing, 'Long live the King!'

And the Pearl shall dance the while.

And his Majesty straight will rescind

His cruel mandate stern,

Then with hearts as light as the snowflake white

We blithely home will turn."

The fat man cried, "Thou fool!

As the body so the brain.

If Bulbul sing, 'Long live the King!'

She will never sing again.

If the Pearl essay to dance,

'Twill be ten feet high in the air,

And we by her side on nothing will ride

To a lively tune and rare."

Bulbul of the tender heart

Said, "I hold with the crooked man.

'Tis a thing of wit, and may make a hit,

And we have no other plan."

And the Pearl and the Dream of Desire

And eke the Dawn of Day

As one agreed it might succeed

And they'd help it on its way.

"We have no other plan.

We are ruined if we do naught.

Good luck to Smudge, the crooked man,

For the frolic he has taught.

The Emperor needs must smile

At the pitiful wit of the jest,

And smiling, he will relent

And recall his stern behest."

* * * * *

The morrow at high noontide

The casement in the gate

Was opened wide to show the face

Of Alamgir the Great,

A lean and agéd man,

With lips as bitter as gall,

And eyes of a hungry wolf,

Looked out from the palace wall.

At once shrill sounds of woe

Arose upon the air,

And a bier went slowly by

In the moted, noontide glare.

A hunchback man and a fat

The foot they bravely bore,

While the head was stayed by a comely maid

And a dame of three good score.

Two other maids in front

Beat breasts and tore their hair,

And the six a lamentation great

Evoked of wild despair.

Yet the curious-eyed might see
That trembled the fat man's knees,
And his wail of woe was fitful and low
As a broken bellows' wheeze.

The Emperor gazed a space,
Then from his casement cried,
"Do ye bear a corpse of note
That ye rend the welkin wide?"

Then Bulbul paused in her wailing,
And raised a tear-stained mien.

"O Sire, 'tis one of a royal line.
We bear the bones of a Queen,

"To lay in her final grave,
With every solemn rite,

The dear dead frame of a royal dame—
Queen Music is she hight."

And again the dirge arose,
And the mourners wept and wailed,
While the fat man's body beneath the bier
Like a quivering aspen quailed.

At last the Emperor speaks,

And at once the six are still,
Watching the while for the royal smile
Which shall bend the royal will.

But the brows grow black with a frown,
No smiles o'er the thin lips creep,
And these words of fate are heard from the gate,
"Go, bury the wanton deep!"

At the sound of ominous doom,
Which rasped like a raven's croak
When he doth spy some carrion nigh
From the limb of a hoary oak,
At once the fat man's knees
Gave way as he sank to the ground,
And the corpse of Queen Music, the bier, and the
pall
Fell on him and wrapped him around.

Then with shrieks of woe and affright
Away in the distance ran
Three maids, who flew with feet of light,
And a bent and crooked man ;
And behind, the Dawn of Day
She hobbled with trembling tread,
And this was the end of the fond device
To bury Queen Music dead.

SAINT PUDDUK

THERE was a mighty king,
Who conquered half the earth,
A potentate of pomp and state,
A man of royal worth.
And he cried to his men, "Go forth!
And summon my nobles grand!
From the west to the east, I'll give them a feast,
The most gorgeous in the land."

And the messengers rode swift,
And eke they galloped far,
And the grandees all, both great and small,
Arrived on horse or car.
And some they came on camels,
And some on elephants high.
Such a host was ne'er seen of the fat and the lean,
Such splendour you never did spy.

The king and all his court
Were roped about with gems.
Each potentate did coruscate
With crowns and diadems.

And they feasted on the best
For two good months and more.
Such guzzling and gorging, canoodling and orgying
Were never on record before.

The nobles as trenchermen
Were all of them hard to beat,
But the king gallant heart, could give each man
a start
And win by a dozen of feet.
For they ate all day and night,
And they drank all night and day.
'Twas a matter of wonder how they packed it all
under,
The tons that they put away.

Now attached to the court was a dhoby,
A humble washer fellow.
At the song and the dance he had never a chance
Of getting the least bit mellow.
For he worked when the sun did shine,
And he toiled when the moon arose,
A miserable sinner, getting thinner and thinner
Awashing the royal clothes.

And attached to this man was a donkey,
A poverty-stricken ass,
Of humble condition, whose only ambition
Was a mouthful of thistle or grass.
He carried the clothes of the king,
And the dhoby man walloped behind,
And at every whack on his blistered back
He tried all he knew not to mind.

But at last the limit was reached,
And one beautiful eventide,
The poor little ass lay down on the grass,
And sobbed for a moment and died.
Alas for the dhoby man !
His ruin he knew would not tarry.
His heart it bled for that quadruped,
For the washing now who would carry ?

He buried the beast that night,
And the morning found him weeping
And tearing his hair in dismal despair
Where that good little ass was sleeping.
And the passers passing by
They heard his wailing notes,
And to sympathize they wiped their eyes,
And coughed in their husky throats.

And they cried, "Alas, poor fellow !
A new-made grave we see,
But prithee tell for whom you yell,
That we share in thy misery."
And the dhoby man wept like a flood,
As if he never would end.
"He's gone to his doom in the silent tomb,
My only and dearest friend.

"I weep for my faithful Pudduk.
If ever there was a saint
In this vale of woe it was he I know,
Of sin without shadow or taint.

Never a word of anger

From my Pudduk for twenty year,
So gentle and lowly, hard-working and holy,
No friend so near and dear."

And the passers-by they sighed,

"Indeed? And is that the case?

Then 'twere passing meet for a saint so sweet
We do an act of grace."

And each man brought a stone,

And placed it upon the grave,

And uttered a prayer to Pudduk there
That the Saint his soul should save.

Now the two long months of revel

At length were finished and done.

From the west to the east such a gorgeous feast
Had never been seen by the sun.

And the monarch he cried to his builders,

"Go! build a tower vast,

As a souvenir without a peer
Of our unique repast."

And the toppers reeled away,

And the gorgers homeward rolled,

But the builders built a tower all gilt,

At a fabulous cost untold;

But fast as the pillar grew

The tomb of the lowly ass

With the stones rose high of the passers-by,

A solid, majestic mass.

Then the monarch he cried in wrath,
 "Remove this rubbish-heap!"
But the people, scared, all loudly declared,
 "'Tis a tomb where a saint doth sleep."
"The man was an ass supreme,"
 Said the king, as he kicked the pile,
"To snuff out so near to my souvenir.
 You must cart him a couple of mile."

'Tis sad when this mighty monarch
 Had spoken the truth by mistake,
A judgment grim should fall upon him,
 And cause the earth to quake.
Next morn the gilded pillar
 Lay flat on the wind-swept plain,
But the donkey's tomb still high did loom
 O'er the ruin with proud disdain.

And the people cried, "Saint Pudduk
 Has taken his vengeance quick,
By smashing the tower as a token of power,
 In return for the monarch's kick."
And the monarch, simple man,
 Was quite of their way of thinking.
"Saint Pudduk, my crime forgive me this time,"
 He cried, on his marrow bones sinking.

And he ordered the stones of the pillar
 To be placed on the asinine grave,
And a stately pile in the very best style,
 With domes and arches brave,

Arose on the level plain
Through the eastern atmosphere.
Of that gorgeous feast the tomb of a beast
Was the only souvenir.

And the fame of that holy shrine
Through the universe was spread,
And pilgrims in shoals came to pray for their souls
To the ass who lay there dead.
And whatever diseases they had
That humanity put on the rack,
They were speedily cured of the ills they endured,
But chiefly of sores on the back.

Now the moral of this sweet tale
Is surely not far to seek :
Than gorging and drinking, 'tis better, I'm thinking,
To be holy and lowly and meek.
And another truth is plain
Which I trust you will not pass :
A tomb may be built all marble and gilt,
And yet cover the bones of an ass.

A LESSON IN PRAYER

ABSORBED in pious thought
The holy prophet rode,
While around him the desert sand
Like a burning furnace glowed.
Perched high on his bubbling camel,
With his chin upon his breast,
He mused on the hundred names of God
And the mansions of the blest.

And behind him rode Amir,
A simple and guileless youth,
Who followed the seer o'er the desert drear
To glean from his lips the truth,
To hear of the Holy Word
And the precepts of the wise,
To learn of the lore of sages hoar
And the marvels of Paradise.

"My father," the stripling cried,
"The sun swings low in the west.
Our weary beasts go slow,
'Tis meet we give them rest.

And thou shouldst break thy fast,
For I ween thou art famishèd.
The soul in its need on prayer can feed,
But the body demandeth bread."

The prophet replied : " My child,
Of the precious gifts most rare
By the great God given to him that has striven
The chief is the power of prayer.
It will bend in their orbits of light
The stars as they onward roll,
It will feed the desire of the flesh
And stay the thirst of the soul.

" There is naught in the universe
That prayer can not achieve,
Be pure in heart and pray,
And praying, do thou believe!
But seeing the beasts are tired,
And thine eyes are heavy with sleep,
We will halt by yon rock whence the waters
gush,
To sink in the desert deep."

The camels knelt and the twain
Slid down upon the sand,
When Amir the feet of his beast
Hobbled loose with a leathern band ;
And minding the words of the sage,
He knelt him down to pray,
" O God, I entreat thee grant the brute
May not break his bonds and stray !"

The prophet smiled: "My son,
Most apt a pupil thou,
Yet to tie thy camel's feet
Showeth want of faith, I trow.
For faith must go with prayer.
Wouldst thou God's power degrade?
The Almighty requireth no hobble to hold
The creature He hath made."

"Ensample I will give
Of what thy prayer should be."
He loosed the rein from his camel's nose,
"Go, range," he cried, "and be free!"
And then he knelt him down,
And straight began to pray,
"O God, to my need take loving heed
That the beast shall not wander away."

The prophet and the youth
They ate their simple fare,
Then laid them to rest on the desert's breast
With hearts that were free from care.
And the myriad eyes of God
Looked down through the heaven above,
In tireless ward o'er the children of men
From the ocean of His love.

When the sky grew red with dawn,
The boy, awaking, scanned
The desert wide on every side,
To find browsing, close at hand,

The camel which he had bound,
But nowhere could he trace
A sign of the steed which the prophet freed
And consigned to the heavenly grace.

"My father," he woke the sage,
"A sorrow hath come to pass.
My camel is here, but thine, I fear,
Has wandered away, alas!"

The aged man arose,
And his eyes went roving far,
Over the weary waste of dunes
To the waning morning star.

Of his camel there was no sign.

Then, folding his hands, he cried,
"Out of the mouths of babes, O Lord,
Thy wisdom is justified.

For presumption of foolish age

I pray that my sin may be shriven.
With faith and prayer, let us never condemn
The hobble which God hath given."

GILEHRI

THE Monarch of Lunka's* Isle,
Rāvana the huge and grim,
Fierce-eyed and thunder-browed,
A giant in thews and limb,
Pushed his savage raid into Ind,
With ravage far and wide,
Homesteads black and ruin and rack
Through the wasted country-side.

And ranging through the woods,
He came to the lowly door
Of the forest hut which the hero Rāma †
Had built by the southern shore.
And here he found fair Sita,
Of brides the loveliest flower,
With her face framed in raven tresses,
Like the moon in a cloudy bower—

Fair Sita who sat by her wheel,
Spinning the livelong day,
While the hero followed the sambhar's slot
In the forest far away.

* Ceylon.

† The national hero of the Rajputs. The second "a" is not pronounced.

And Rāvana seized the bride,
And cried with a mocking smile,
“The prize to the bold, to have and to hold,”
And he bore her to Lunka's Isle.

Gilehri, the little grey squirrel,
Who lives in the jutting eaves,
He heard the taunt from his airy haunt
Among the pipal-leaves.
Gilehri, the little grey squirrel,
He ran through wood and wold,
Till Rāma he found by a stricken stag,
And to him the tale he has told.

“Fair Sita is gone, is gone!”
The little grey squirrel cried.
“Seized by the villain Rāvana,
To be his island bride.
Broken I ween her heart.
Her shrieks they rent the air,
For the demon caught her as she fled
And haled her away to despair.”

The eyes of the hero Rāma
Went blazing red as fire,
And for a space he could not speak,
So terrible his ire.
At last his wrath burst forth.
“I swear by the heaven and earth,
I will not rest till I cleave the crest
Of this monster of evil birth.”

He summoned the king of the folk

Who live in the swinging trees,
And he bade him build a bridge
Over the narrow seas.

Then Hanumān * and his kin

The rocks from the roots they tore,
And the channel filled, a bridge to build
That should stretch from shore to shore.

The mountains they threw in the sea,
To cross the strait to the isle,
And with furious haste o'er the ocean waste
They raised a massive pile,
And ever upon the shore
Great Rāma he cried in his need,
“Quicker, my friends, and quicker still!
Oh, toil with your utmost speed.”

Gilehri, the little grey squirrel,
He heard the king of men,
And sorely distressed was his furry breast,
As he crouched in his leafy den.
And he thought, “The smallest I,
Of the folk of the forest shade,
But my very best I will try.
I will give what I can of aid.”

So he rolled up a ball of clay
And carried it in his hands
To where the hero stood
Upon the golden sands.

* The king of the monkeys.

“And see,” he chirruped, “my king,
Some clay from the bank of the brook.
Perchance it will serve to fill
In the bridge some tiny nook.”

And the king in kindness smiled,
As the squirrel he raised in his palm.
“The world shall know of thy deed,
True friend of Sita and Rāma.
Thou art small but hast done thy best,
And famous in song and rhyme,
Thy love for me shall immortal be
Through the æons of spacious time.”

As he stroked the glossy fur,
Each finger drew a line
From the shoulder to the tail
Along the grey skin fine.
“Behold!” he gaily laughed,
“I write my sign on thee,
That all may know, ‘’Tis the friend of Rāma,
Who served him faithfully.’”

The bridge was built and the king
To Lunka’s isle passed o’er,
Where he smote the giant huge,
And fleshed his steel in gore,
And again he won fair Sita,
And carried her over the sea,
Back to their pleasant jungle life
Beneath the greenwood tree.

Through the length and breadth of Ind
The story has oft been told
Of the monkey-built bridge o'er the strait,
And the deeds of the hero bold.
And ever with it is entwined
Gilehri the squirrel's name,
Who to aid the right brought his tiny mite
And earned undying fame.

The grey squirrel chirrup and leaps
Through the length and breadth of Ind,
And the man who hurts the friend of Rāma
Most grievously hath sinned.
Gilehri the little grey squirrel
Is loved from east to west,
And bearing the sign of the hero divine,
Is accounted by men most blest.

THE LAMENT OF GANGA DIN

MY brothers, lo ! I have got the jawáb*
 For serving too well the Inglis Sahib.
 His name Eesmith. You know him well.
 I pray ye listen, and I will tell
 The dark, sad tale of tyrannous wrong.
 For we are weak and the Sahibs are strong,
 And bitter the bread of life which we eat,
 As they trample us down beneath their feet.

For ten long years his bearer I've been,
 Eesmith Sahib's bearer, Ganga Din.
 I have eaten his salt, and 'tis no false pride
 When I say that in all this country wide
 Your steed must be swift and far you must ride,
 Ere you find another so faithful and keen
 As Eesmith Sahib's bearer, Ganga Din.

Who guarded his clothes with watchful care
 But this poor worm, now adrift to despair ?
 True, the worn-out things were my perquisite meet.
 That life's indeed bitter that hath no sweet.
 But my Sahib was no Eurasian poor,
 And well he should dress by the latest dastur †

* Dismissal.

† Fashion.

Of balaiti* log, which changes each day ;
 And I swear by the Prophet that none can say
 I ever allowed my Sahib to wear
 A garment which showed the smallest tear.

And tears will come. The jungle thorn
 Which looks like a tiger's claw,
 Will produce a tear above suspicion,
 The most natural ever you saw.
 But for a hole in the breeches' seat,
 If you would toil like a workman neat,
 A couple of stones I would recommend,
 With the cloth between, rubbed end to end.

And to save the Sahib's precious time,
 Each week I wrote the dhobi's† list.
 Is this imputed to me as crime,
 For the Sahib to storm and shake his fist,
 That no man of woman born can read
 The twisted letters of the screed ?
 Not even I ? Does that take aught
 From my good name or virtuous deed ?

Kálurs or drárs‡, did I forget
 One rag of all the dhobi's debt ?
 And if some things were lost or strayed,
 No clothes were yet immortal made ;
 And only garments out of date
 Were taken thus by a kindly fate.

* Foreign people.

† Washerman.

‡ Collars or drawers.

Then who will throw the stone of blame
Or write "Dishonest" on my name?
Go, ask the dhobi, those who would be wiser,
In sharing aught if ever I played miser?

The darzi and mochi* too you'll find
Will still aver I was ever kind.
Ample I gave. They were well content,
For I never took more than fifty per cent.
'Tis an easy rate to work in one's brain.

The Sahib pays ten rupees.
I pass on five to the tailor man,
And keep the rest as my fees.

Peace! peace! my friends, there is no need
To applaud too loud the generous deed.
'Twas simple justice. The manual labour
Was done by an image of God, my neighbour,
And I would deem it scarcely right,
Did I give naught to the lowly wight.
More arduous mine the mental toil,
But always I shared an equal spoil.
The Sahib pays; he can afford,
Who rules as arbiter and lord.
But still some judgment is required

To know how much and when and where
To extract the due amount desired,

And this has been my special care.
And year in, year out, whate'er befell,
Ye will grant I succeeded fairly well.

* Tailor and shoemaker.

What talk is this that I robbed my lord ?
 He freely gave of his own accord
 For value received. Is the Sahib a fool,
 To be forced by those who are under his rule ?
 He freely gave. I, as freely, took,
 And clear is my name in the Judgment Book.

The lamps were my peculiar trust,
 To wipe them clean from dirt and dust ;
 And clean they were, or the scullion lad
 Had looked more chastened, contrite, and sad.
 For every day when I smoked my hookah,
 He worked at my direction,
 And they shone like moons ere they could pass
 The test of my stern inspection.

I watered the oil, I boldly avow.
 Should shame then furrow this honoured brow ?
 For a paltry gain from a source discreet
 Is calumny aye to dog my feet ?
 I grant that the oil then burnt more dim,
 But my thought alone was to benefit him,
 My master, whose salt I daily ate
 (And sold, it is true, at the market rate.)
 His eyes are failing ; if dim the light
 He retires the sooner to sleep for the night.
 I salved his sight and refreshed his brain.
 Is this, then, accounted no lasting gain ?
 Of our senses our eyes are most precious and blest,
 And which of God's gifts is better than rest ?

In the morn I dusted each separate room,
 And carefully swept the dirt to the gloom
 Of a corner retired, where none should see,
 That all to the eye might spotless be.

But why do I thus pass in review
 My ten years' service good and true?
 If I indeed was all that I say,
 Then why did my master turn me away?

For behold the letter the Sahib gave.

On Sarkari * paper 'tis writ,
 In the Sahib's own hand. See the Government seal!

A noble, superlative chit! †
 I laid it before the scribe at the gate,
 Its lofty purport to read and translate.
 This chit describes the ten years' length
 Of my service tried, how I spent my strength
 Both early and late at household toil,
 In guarding his clothes, his lamps, and oil,
 And it ends by hoping I ne'er shall need
 Of all I deserve the fullest meed.

The scribe declare d of the myriad chits

Which ever he read in his time,
 This one excelled by a lengthy rood

For its soaring words sublime.
 It was full of praise most wisely applied,
 And the epithets flowed like a rising tide;
 But one above all he would have me enthrone
 In my memory's seat, apart and alone.

* Government.

† Letter.

It was "Rottah," the choicest term that's sung
 By a flattering Sahib in his alien tongue.
 So pleased was I to hear and see
 The gracious words here written of me,
 That I gave the scribe a double fee.

Then why did the Sahib cast me lightly aside,
 Of his household the mainstay, prop, and pride?

Believe it or not, the truth I tell,

My brothers, I do not know.

'Tis a mystery all. No cause can I give

For the sudden and crushing blow.

Without doubt the Sahibs have wildering ways.

They are food for hell, the Great Book says.

I have busily studied for fifty years

This race which glories in our tears,

And at times I have found of reason's light

A ray or two shine through the night.

Yet this surpasses all my skill,

And a portent strange it remaineth still.

I will tell you the tale. Yourselves shall strive

The riddle to read, the rock to rive.

At six o'clock in the early morn

I take the Sahib his tea,

Which I lay on a table beside his head

As silent as may be.

And then I warily lift the sheet,

That has guarded all night the Sahib's feet,

And with lissome fingers and touch of air,

I encase his feet in a woollen pair

Of socks, which are specially set aside
 For this purpose strange and undignified.
 And still he lies in a slumber deep,
 And joyless my life if I break his sleep.
 My task completed, I slip away,
 As noiseless as a shadow play.

My brothers all! I cannot conceive

What means this mystic, peculiar rite
 Of the wearing of socks in the morn, but believe
 'Tis a symbol which shows how the sun god's
 light

Is obscured by the shadows of darkness and
 night.

Perchance 'tis a form of worship base,
 All lacking in seemliness, virtue, and grace.

But this I know, that my Sahib's command
 Was stern and strict, and each morn with this hand
 For ten long years I did as he bade,
 And his toes in the woollen socks arrayed.

And then came his marriage. Six months ago
 He crossed the Black Water on short furlough.
 And when he returned a bride he brought,
 An English Mem,* a child untaught,
 A simple girl, all pink and white,
 And I scarce could conceal a pious delight,
 When I thought how priceless would be my aid,
 And how seldom my counsel would be gainsaid

* Lady.

In the purchase of stores and in household control ;
And a blessed peace came over my soul,
As I dreamed I had reached a long-sought goal.

When the carriage drew up in the afternoon,
The men of the house stood around,
And we welcomed the Sahib and his beautiful Mem
With salaams right down to the ground,
And she smiled and said a kindly word,
With a voice like the chirp of a singing bird,
To each and all ; so when they retired,
We were filled with a holy calm,
And the thought that our tankas* would surely rise
Soothed our souls like a gentle balm.

And I above all resolved that the Saint
In me should find no cause of complaint.
So next morn I duly prepared the tea,
And when the clock struck the hour,
I stole inside the bedroom door,
As silent as lay in my power.

The room was dark, but I knew the road,
And softly placed my little load
On a table small by the Sahib's head,
And then I went to the foot of the bed.
I raised the sheet and soon laid bare
My master's feet, then with touch of air
Drew on the socks. The light in the room
Was dim, but in spite of the shadowy gloom,

* Wages.

For the first time I noticed the Sahib's feet
 Were not of an equal size.
 I stared; there surely was no mistake,
 Though I rubbed my startled eyes.
 The left was two inches shorter at least.
 'Twas strange that never before
 Had I noticed the fact as I clothed his toes,
 And drew the coverings o'er.
 But 'twas nothing to me. In vain the task
 A Feringhee's* riddle to strive to unmask.
 I shrugged my shoulders and went my way
 To begin the toil of the coming day.

Another bed was there I knew,
 But reverently I kept my view
 Upon my task. Not meet that I
 On Zenana sanctity should pry.

'Twas barely nine by the sentry's gong,
 When the Sahib an order sent
 That I should attend in the Duftur † room,
 And thither at once I went.
 His face was stern, but he showed no rage
 As he handed me my monthly wage,
 And this chit, which he wrote with his own right
 hand,
 And then he uttered this brief command,
 "You will leave my service at once. Now go!
 And again your face never dare to show."

* Foreigner.

† Office.

And that was all. Within the hour

I was bundled out then and there,
With my goods and my chattels, my children and
wives,

To ruin and utter despair.

Next day when the Sahib had gone to his Court,
And I knew that no longer my plaint he could thwart,
I crept back soft to the bungalow,
At the Memsahib's feet intending to throw
My aged limbs and forgiveness beg,

If haply her woman's breast
Could pity feel for the poor in heart,
The lowly and sore oppressed.

She was lying at length on a garden seat,
But she saw me coming and sprang to her feet.
Her eyes were staring and her cheeks were red,
As she gathered her skirts and instantly fled.
Then out ran an ayah, that morning installed,
And her stream of abuse would have more than
appalled

A man of brass. It was "idiot" and "owl,"
And "fool" and "dolt" and all things foul;
For an ayah's tongue of venom reeks,
And railing and lies the language she speaks.
I slunk away with my hands to my ears,
And my sad heart weeping with blood for tears.

What does it mean? In a moment I,
From a Sardar * bearer, enthroned on high,

Have been plunged into the cavern deep
Where the idle Ummedwars* cringe and weep.
And why? And why? Have I the pest?
Does a leprous taint my veins infest?
Does a deadly disease on my being encroach,
That the Memsahib should fly at my very approach?
Or is this the truth: both great and small,
Are the Sahib folk lunatics, one and all?

* Applicants for employment.

CHITTU

I

IN all the village of Ratherpur
The prettiest girl by a mile
Was Chittu, the swineherd's daughter fair.
She was tall and slim and as wild as a hare
And she wore a bewitching smile.

She was scarcely sixteen years of age,
And 'twas getting a positive scandal
That still she should unwedded be ;
Yet the suitors who came all seemed to agree
She was hardly worth the candle.

For the swineherd had nothing but pigs to give,
And pigs are not much of a lure.
So in spite of her smile and her raven curls,
There was no demand for dowerless girls
In the village of Ratherpur.

And to make the matter a great deal worse,
The maiden had lost her heart
To Larki Lál, the village gallant,
Who for charming of snakes had a marvellous talent.
Being quite an adept in the art.

"Will you marry me, Larki?" Chittu enquired.

(She was not remarkably coy.)

"Just look at my eyes and my lips, my dear!

Nicer girls than me are not made about here.

Now, do! there's a good old boy!"

She was sitting by Larki's side in the shade.

I will not defend the position.

When she smiled and dropped her lustrous eyes,

It was surely a chance that would tantalise

A youth with the least ambition.

But Larki Lál on the main chance kept

Ever a wary eye.

"I will take you," he said, "as Number Two.

To thee the half of my heart shall be true,

Or at least it can but try."

The girl flew up like a fury loosed.

"I know your Number One.

She is Kola, the daughter of Kutta Pál,

The Keeper of Hounds. Do you know, Larki Lál,

She weighs just fifteen stone?

"Do you think that I will be Number Two

To a tub of a girl like that?"

"Her father will give her a buffalo,"

The snake man said, "And I'll never say 'No,'

For a morsel of extra fat."

"You'll be kissing the beast instead of the bride.

The two are as like as twins,"

Sneered Chittu, the Scornful ; but Larki said,
“ A dowry is better than lips that are red.

In love it is property wins.”

“ All’s over between us,” the maiden cried.

“ If I marry you I’ll be blessed !”

But of course she meant something stronger than
that.

“ Wish you joy of your Kola ! Glad you like fat !”

And she ran like a thing possessed.

II

But when she reached the wall of the fort,

She saw in the shade of the gate

A jeweller, spreading his glittering ware

Of emeralds and diamonds and rubies rare,

On gold and silver plate,

To show to the queens in the palace near,

The wives of the Ratherpur chief.

The maiden’s eyes went opening wide,

Her little throat gulped and she gaily cried,

“ They’re lovely past belief.

“ Oh ! do let me look ! just one little look !”

The jolly jeweller laughed.

“ You may take a peep as an act of grace,

For the sake of your winning eyes and face,

Which are toys make all of us daft.

“ But I will not trust those fingers quick.

So hands behind, my child !”

The girl stooped down, with her small hands
clasped
Behind her back, and she gazed and gasped,
And her heart went beating wild.

Here was dowry enough for a thousand girls,
And she busily thought of a way.
Her little nose bent and her hair gave a shake,
A little tongue flashed like a quivering snake,
And a ruby had leapt from the tray.

“Now run! you imp!” the jeweller cried.
“You have seen quite enough. Be off!”
Her thanks she found it hard to express,
But mumbled and stammered in marked distress,
And gave such a queer little cough.

III

But when that evening Larki Lál
Was smoking beneath the bough,
Fair Chittu appeared with a comical twist
To her girlish mouth, as she held out her fist,
And asked, “Will you marry me now?”

“Will you marry me, Larki, now, my boy,
That I am an heiress grand,
Who can buy fat Kola a hundred fold?”
She opened her fist and lo! and behold!
A ruby shone red in her hand.

The snake man smiled all across his face.
“How did you get it, Chit?”

"I opened my mouth and the gem dropped in
By a heavenly chance," she said with a grin,
And hopped with the joy of her wit.

"Of course I will marry you, Chittu, my bride"—
The girl gave a cry of rapture—
"But I'm thinking sometimes a heavenly chance
Leads on to a judge and the deuce of a dance
That may end in a sweet wife's capture.

"So give me the gem and I'll keep it safe
In a place of which no one will dream."
He opened a basket where he stood,
And a cobra rose with spectacled hood,
While the girl gave a terrified scream.

"It is Nāg,* the Horror, my King of Snakes,
The boiled-down essence of sin."
The snake man moved in a measure weird,
And the cobra followed with crest upreared,
And his eyes like a diamond pin.

"Take care! He will strike," cried the frightened
girl.
But Larki laughed, and his hand
He flickered in front of the cruel head.
The cobra hissed with a fury dread,
And he struck like a levin brand.

But swifter still the snake man leaped,
And the cobra hit the ground.

* The "a" is long as in "cargo."

Then ere he could turn, friend Larki caught
The sinewy neck, though the reptile fought
Like a devil new trapped and bound.

The snake coiled tight upon his arm,
And it hissed with fetid breath.
But Larki pushed down the sabre-like teeth,
And, "See how the poison drips beneath!
'Tis the very gate of death.

"And the gate of our treasure-house too, my love.
Now give me the heavenly chance."
The trembling girl was dumb with fear.
She gave up the gem, which he took with a leer
And a sidelong, covetous glance.

Then he cut the poison bag with a knife,
And slipped the stone inside.
With a needle he sewed the tiny slit.
"See! there is our treasure safe, my Chit,
As if guarded by armies," he cried.

He shut King Nág in his basket home,
Where like a boiling kettle
The serpent fumed. Then cried her lover,
With a meaning smile, "To lift that cover
Will take a man of mettle."

And Chittu's eyes wore a troubled look.
She had noted that covetous glance.
Her gem was gone, and if untrue
Her lover proved, what could she do?
'Twere good-bye to her "heavenly chance."

But soon she forgot the fleeting doubt,
For Larki was ever so kind,
As he sang and danced in his happiest mood,
And the lovers they kissed and billed and cooed,
With sighs soft as summer wind.

IV

But alas for love and lovers' joys!
When Chittu next morn had arisen,
Her heart o'erbrimming with love and peace,
She found herself seized by the village police,
And lodged in the Ratherpur prison.

"For lifting a ruby," that was the case,
Which Young Innocence stoutly denied.
But they kept her in quod for the best of a week,
And never did Larki come to speak
One word to his plighted bride.

They searched her father, his house, and pigs.
They watched her night and morning.
Not the ghost of a ruby could they see,
So for want of evidence set her free,
With a very solemn warning.

V

Then quickly Chittu ran for home.
On the way she heard tum-tumming,
The beat of a drum and the lilt of a song,
And the tripping of feet that dance along.
'Twas a marriage party coming.

One glance, and of her maiden breast
A demon took possession,
For Kola and Larki, drunk as owls,
Were dancing about with hideous howls,
And a buffalo closed the procession.

To Chittu's eyes the ground seemed to heave,
And the skies went dizzily spinning.
Unseen she slipped up a winding street,
And stumbled on with dragging feet,
Away from the tom-tom's dinning.

Alas for a maid who is forced to trust,
On a snake man's word dependent!
She had lost her gem and her Larki Lál,
And the hateful daughter of Kutta Pál,
Fat Kola, was in the ascendant.

One thing she could do, and she swore she would
too,
With an oath that would open your eyes:
False Larki might marry his heavy-weight,
She cared not a jot, but as sure as fate
She would get back her beautiful prize.

VI

The snake man's hut deserted stood.
She picked up a bamboo stick.
Her heart was thumping wild with fear,
But her rage drove her on, and stepping near,
She opened the doorway quick.

Before her the dreadful basket lay,
The home of the Essence of Sin.
Inside she could hear the boiling hiss,
And she uttered a fervent, "Pray God I don't
miss!"
Then swiftly glided in.

She stooped and loosed the encircling rope.
At once the cover flew high,
And Nág, the King of Snakes, appeared,
On a maze of night-black coils upreared,
And death in his angry eye.

The girl gave a blow and of course she missed,
Then dropped her stick and ran.
While the serpent followed with sweeping curves
And a hiss that would jolt the strongest nerves
Of the boldest-hearted man.

But Chittu's legs I have said were long,
And her feet with fear flew apace,
And at last when she stood to draw her breath,
She saw afar the Monarch of Death
Had stopped from the hopeless chase.

He had sunk his crest and was gliding on
With a cobra's firm insistence.
The girl plucked up her courage anew,
And turning, she kept the snake in view
At a most respectful distance.

And when they came to the Potter's well,
The serpent's evident goal,
The long black coils, that seemed without end,
The slippery wall began to descend,
And vanished at last in a hole.

You'd think now the ruby was gone for ever,
But the girl had a fertile brain.
From her skimpy bodice a pin she took,
And bent it round in the shape of a hook,
Then searched in her garments again,

And produced a line which she tied to the pin.
It appeared she was going to angle,
For she caught a frog as a lure to entice,
And inserting the hook, she began in a trice
Her bait down the well to dangle.

The frog was hanging in front of the hole,
And squawked with a loud lamentation.
The hours went by but the snake sat tight.
The maiden fished, but got never a bite
To give her the least elation.

VII

She began to despair as the sun went down.
The ruby she'd never see more.
When again she suddenly heard the drumming
And squealing of fifes towards her coming,
With yells in inebriate roar.

She climbed a tree whence she could see
The long procession pass.
The buffalo now held the place of pride,
And on it fat Kola was sitting astride,
While Lárki was riding an ass.

And the conduct of that disgraceful pair
Was really quite too shocking.
Their eyes were bleared in the torches' light,
And they rolled about in a pitiful plight,
Like boats in a wild storm rocking.

But the climax came when they reached the
well,
For Larki here got down,
And kissing the buffalo-cow on the nose,
He called her his Marigold, Lotus, and Rose!
Of his life the Cream and Crown.

Precisely as Chittu in scorn had predicted,
He mistook the brute for the bride,
And declared that patient, long-suffering beast
Should take her share of the wedding feast,
Ere another step he would ride.

Then he brought a pitcher of strong palm wine,
And into the bridal dowry
He insisted on pouring the fiery liquor,
While he murmured with tongue growing thicker
and thicker
Soft terms of endearment flowery.

The effect on the buffalo soon was seen.

She gave a sudden prance,
Which threw fat Kola down from her perch;
Then the beast with a sidelong, shuffling lurch
Went round in a bovine dance,

That resembled a steam-engine trying to waltz.

The procession fled pell-mell,
When suddenly as the buffalo gay
Danced round the pit, the sides gave way,
And she dropped down the yawning well.

VIII

By this the groom and his bride obese
Had tranquilly fallen asleep.
The wedding guests ran back with a shout,
And there was the dowry jiggling about
In the inky water deep.

For still she moved her heavy limbs
In a kind of forlorn can-can,
And she uttered a hiccoughing bellow long,
Like a tripper who sings a drinking song
With his pals on a shanderdan.

The wedding guests ran swift for ropes,
But before they could lower a strand,
They saw a huge serpent emerge from a hole;
It was Nág, the Horror, black as coal,
And swelling with fury grand,

That his peaceful retreat should invaded be
By a drunken buffalo.

The hood spread out as he gathered to spring.
He would teach the fool for the Serpent King
A proper respect to show.

The horrified guests gazed down with dread
As the torches lit the gloom.
The black head poised like the lance of fate,
While the buffalo danced inebriate,
Unconscious of her doom.

But just in the nick of time there passed
Old Buddhu, the village Shikarry,
Who could nose a feast like a trusty hound;
For well he knew good things are found
When folks are about to marry.

He pushed his way through the wedding throng,
His matchlock old unslung,
Took a deadly aim with conscious pride,
And pulled the trigger. The well's steep side
With the thunderous echo rung.

When the gun's report had died away,
They heard the buffalo groan.
The rolling wreaths of vapour cleared,
And upside down the cow appeared,
As still as a paving-stone.

Had Buddhu missed the serpent huge,
And hit the cow instead?

Had the cobra struck before he fired?
Had the wedding dowry indeed expired?
Had she fainted or was she dead?

The snake at any rate was not there,
But only the swineherd's daughter
From her lofty perch on the leaning tree
Had marked his shot-mangled form as he
Plunged lifeless into the water.

The ropes were lowered and the buffalo
Was dragged to the upper level.
She was dead as a nail, though no wound was
found,
And the Brahman priests who stood around
Declared, "'Tis the work of the devil."

But Kutta Pál insisted upon
Post-mortem examination,
When they found that she died of shock to the
mind,
With alcoholic excess, combined
With fatty degeneration.

IX

The disconsolate owner then woke the groom,
By stroking his head with a rock.
When Larki heard that the cow was dead,
He sleepily murmured, "Go home to bed!
The wedding is off, Old Cock!

“ My Sainted Mother forbade me take
A dowerless wife to my arms.
My soul revolts from an overfat bride,
Who drinks too much and who rides astride.
I'm fed up with Kola's charms.”

Then he swaggered away with uncertain gait,
And this was the end of the wedding.
The bride and the dowry they put in a cart,
And slowly the guests began to depart,
Their way in sorrow treading.

X

The morning light was grey in the sky,
When a girl climbed down the rope
That hung from the steep well's slippery side,
And she laughed with a joy she could not hide,
And her eyes shone bright with hope.

The water was cold, yet she did not flinch,
But lowering herself to her lip,
She began to fish with sensitive toe
For something she hoped to find below
And with her small feet to grip.

At last she drew up a long black thing,
And sang aloud with glee,
“ Ho! ho! fat Kola! your buffalo's dead,
And I have got back my ruby red.
Now Larki will marry me.”

XI

The time went on and the village life
 Flowed on from day to day.
But sorrow abode with Kutta Pál,
And every one noticed that Larki Lál
 Seemed silently wasting away.

King Nág was gone, he knew not where,
 And with him the priceless treasure.
Though a simple and hard-working Son of Toil,
Yet fate all his efforts appeared to foil,
 So his grief was beyond all measure.

One eve he was walking in pensive mood,
 When Chittu passed beside him.
She was driving her pigs and singing the while,
And as she passed she gave him a smile
 Which almost petrified him.

For the smile showed two brilliant rows of teeth,
 But what was remarkably curious
Was the fact that between her incisors white
Was a stone which gleamed with a blood-red
 light,
And the sight made his heart beat furious.

He quickly stepped to the maiden's side.

 "Ah, Chittu! forgive me, Sweet!"

He sighed as he wiped a manly tear,

"I have sinned. I repent, and again, my Dear,
 I lay my heart at thy feet.

“I never loved any but thee, my Queen,
And in spite of my Sainted Mother,
No dowry I'll ask save one sweet smile,
And through all the long years without any
guile
I'll love thee and never another.

“The buffalo's dead and Kola's too fat,”
And again he caught sight of the ruby.
“You thought you could chisel a trusting maid,
But you've burnt your fingers, I'm afraid,
You silly old Dunce of a Booby!

“But I'll forgive you, Larki, my boy,
And so let bygones be.
And let us again be lovers fond,
And send for the priests to hallow the bond
Uniting you and me.

“But I'll have no drinking, not a drop,
And, mayhap you'll think it funny,
Should your bride bring a dowry after all,
She will not bestow it, however small,
Till after the ceremony.”

XII

Ho, minstrels! beat the throbbing drum!
And bang the jangling cymbal!
Ho, singers! open wide your throats!
Ho, dancers! dance to the roaring notes
In your mazy dances nimble!

Make room, make room for Larki Lál !
And for Chittu, his blushing bride !
And scatter fresh flowers for their feet to tread,
The happiest pair that ever were wed
In all the country-side.

The priests have lighted the sacred fire,
And Chittu with gentle grace
Six times leads Larki around the flame,
The seventh she yields with modest shame
To the groom the foremost place.

And then the priests sing the holy chant,
And tie the maiden's veil
To the bridegroom's scarf in a wedding knot,
And the rite is over. United their lot
Till the sands of their being fail.

Then Larki kissed his happy bride,
And clasped her to his breast,
When something flashed like a little red cherry
From her lips to his, and they both grew merry
With the mirth of a hidden jest.

And they lived long years in the land of Ind,
Where they say that the heat is cruel.
Here ends my tale, and if too long,
The blame not so much to me should belong
As to Chittu who priggd the jewel.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES
OF
COLONEL BERTIE LONGBOW, V.C.

I. HIS STRANGEST YARN

THE Colonel took a deeper drink,
And blew a bigger cloud,
Then by the loungers at the Club
Was heard to muse aloud—

“’Tis queer what foolish lies men tell.
It really causes grief.
Then, if you give them truth, you’ll find
To her fair beauty they are blind.
Her tales get no belief.”

“A liar thinks all tales are lies
That in the least are strange.
No call to show surprise. His spots
The leopard cannot change.”

“And yet no tales so strange as those
Which truth keeps in her store.
I know a few, but never mind!
Old yarns are apt to bore.”

We begged him to refresh our hearts
From Truth's pellucid well.
At last the Colonel cleared his throat,
And thus his tale did tell—

“The strangest thing I call to mind
That ever happed to me
Was in the jungles of Bengal
In eighteen fifty three.

“It was a summer eve and I
Was beating through a valley,
When up a woodcock whirled and flew
Adown a sylvan alley.

“I gave him law. No man can say
I ever hunt to pot.
One hundred yards at least he flew
Before I fired a shot.

“Of course he fell, but when I ran
To bag my fallen prey,
I saw a sight you seldom see
Upon a hunting day.

“The sudden shot awoke from sleep
A huge rhinoceros,
Who sprang up snorting with alarm,
With the hoot of a motor-bus.

“The woodcock swooping from above
Then struck him in the eye.
The long beak pierced into his brain,
And the rhino turned to die.

“But as he fell he sat upon
A wild pig and her litter,
And slew the lot, for the rhino is
A comprehensive sitter.

“A dozen pigs, a Rhino, and
A wild cock of the wood!
And all the victims of one shot!
In truth 'twas fairly good.”

The Colonel paused. We gave a cheer
To express our admiration,
When gently did he wave his hand
In mild expostulation.

“What I have told is strange, 'tis true.
But often have I seen
Things like to this in lands and climes
Where I have hunting been.

“The strangest part of this my tale,
My friends, is yet to tell :
I stooped and freed the woodcock's bill
From the rhino where he fell.

"The bird it struggled to be free.

I turned it round and round,
But not the smallest sign of wound
In all its body found.

"I'd missed my aim. The bird had swooped

To earth from fright alone,
And in its swoop had struck the beast
Who now lay dead as stone.

"I'd missed my aim. A tale so strange

With doubt indeed you'll view,
But though wellnigh impossible,
I swear that it is true."

II. THE STORY OF ALGERNON STEELE

“It was long before the Mutiny days
That I rode with Slasher’s Horse.
I was captain then, and ’tis vain to hide
That Bertie Long was the joy and pride
Of the whole of her Majesty’s force.

“A nice, decent sort were the Slasher’s mess,
Except for young Algernon Steele,
Our very last joined and most dandified sub,
Who thought of creation he was the hub
And the rest of us flies on the wheel.

“I detest a man who gives himself airs
He’s often an ass infernal.
But such was our Algernon, head to foot,
And often I’ve longed to give him the boot
In return for his cheek eternal.

“An eye-glass he wore and a silly smile,
And his teeth were remarkably prominent.
His face was the colour of unbaked dough,
But a very long nose like the beak of a crow
Was the feature which you’d call dominant.

“He left us soon for far Bengal,
And I owned to a chastened elation
When I heard that a tiger had swallowed young
Steele.

’Tis strange how often for others we feel
A pious and mild resignation.

“Some ten years passed, and I made a tour
In the jungles just north of Calcutta,
Where I heard that a tiger had made his den,
A monstrous beast, who dined off men
As you eat bread and butter.

“An old and wizened shred of a man
It was who brought me the khabar.*
‘I can show you,’ he said, ‘the very place
Where the tiger drinks,’ and his grinning face
Went bending about like rubber.

“‘What the deuce do you mean?’ and I cursed his
eyes,

‘With your antediluvian grin?’
‘He very big tiger, my lord,’ he replied,
‘He have room for a dozen like me inside,
And he like an old devil for sin.

“‘We poor folk think this tiger fierce
Is under a magic charm.
He has drunk our blood and crunched our bones,
And the spell has been woven of dying groans
Which keeps him safe from harm.’

* News.

“‘What rot!’ I cried. ‘Has any one tried
The magic beast to pot?’

‘Yes. Sahibs have come to the forest deep.
They sat up at night, but they fell asleep,
And the tiger went by unshot.’

“‘You’re coming some game. Speak out, you
imp!’

I said in accents mild,
But Methuselah only raised his hands.
‘I speak the truth as my lord commands.
I’m only a jungle child.

“‘The Sahibs sit up by the pool where he drinks,
And they always fall asleep.
They sit up once, but never again.
Next day they ride off across the plain
Like foolish frightened sheep.

“‘And they never come back. One night I too
Sat up by the forest stream,
And I fell asleep.’ ‘What happened then?’
I asked, but the old man grinned again.
‘Perhaps I had a dream.’

“‘But never mind, Sahib. The tiger lives,
Undug is still his grave.
But not for a bribe of untold gold
Will I sit up again.’ My blood ran cold
So queer was the look he gave.

“‘I will show you the place, my noble lord ;
But if my lord is wise,
He won't sit up alone, and he will not sleep,
But ever a tireless watch will keep,
With steady, unwinking eyes.’

“I shook myself up and drank a peg,
For the man was quite uncanny.
‘You miserable fraud ! you're in the wrong bunk.
Bertie Longbow's no babe to be put in a funk
By a tale that might frighten his granny.’

“My friends ! you know me fairly well,
And you've never heard me boast ;
And when I say I know not fear,
That the word conveys no sense to my ear,
I express the opinion of most.

“So of course you are not surprised to learn
That night I sat up alone,
For come what may, the best or the worst,
At danger's call I am ever the first,
And pretty quick too, you must own.

“'Twas a lovely night ; the moon rose high
And gleamed upon the pool.
I'd built a machán * in a lofty tree.
The forest was calm as calm could be,
And the wind was pleasantly cool.

* Platform.

“I sat with a rifle across my knee,
And my eye on the jungle stream,
And I could not help thinking how absurd
Was the tale of that hoary, mendacious bird.
What the deuce did the beggar dream?

“Then all of a sudden, I must have dozed,
The wind blew so soft in my hair,
When I felt a hand was twitching my sleeve.
I opened my eyes, and you'll scarce believe
When I tell you of what was there.

“A long jointed hand was pointing down,
A hand without skin or flesh.
I followed the line—at the forest pool
A tiger was lapping the water cool
As it ran from the streamlet fresh.

“My eyes went back up the thin, bony arm,
And at once I grew ten years older.
A very long nose like the beak of a crow,
An eye-glass and teeth that stuck out below
Were peering above my shoulder.

“The rest of the face was all bone like the
hand,
But one glance was enough for me.
The face was the face of Algernon Steele,
As much as was left from the tiger's meal.
No shadow of doubt it was he.

“What happened next I scarcely know,
But my rifle went off with a roar,
And a ghostly voice, like a sobbing wind,
Said, ‘You’ve missed him, you fool! You fired
behind,’
Then I fainted and heard nothing more.

“It was daylight broad when I awoke,
And on the way back to my tent
I was met by that simple jungle child,
And gargoyle-like was the smile he smiled,
As down to the earth he bent.

“‘Salaam!’ he cried, ‘I heard a gun.
Has the tiger then been slain?
Or did my lord fall asleep by the stream,
And in his sleep did he dream a dream?
Will the Sahib sit up again?’

“‘Will you stop your row!’ I said with an oath.
‘The bullet by chance hit a stone.
I dreamed no dream, for I did not sleep,
And I’d sit up again, but I have to keep
An appointment I can’t postpone.’

“Of course this was a fake. I’m brave, you know,
And never inclined to boast,
But though tiger-shooting is quite to my mind,
I don’t care for a nose with no face behind.
I draw the line at a ghost.

“ ‘They all say that. Will the Sahib come back?’

Methusaleh then enquired.

‘Here, get out of this!’ I cried in a rage,

‘Or I’ll hoof you out, in spite of your age.’

And the fraud very swiftly retired.

“Well! there’s the tale. What did Algie think

He could do with his ghostly hand,

His beak-like nose, and his glass and his teeth?

Was he taking revenge, or was something beneath

That no mortal can understand?

“I give it up, though in my life

Strange things have come to pass.

His intention was probably all for the best,

But his methods were crude, it must be confessed.

He was always such an ass.”

III. WILD DOGS

THE Colonel pensively sipped the peg,
Which was brought by a mild Oriental.
"You may talk of voracity, sir," said he,
(The subject had never been mentioned by me,)
"But your knowledge is quite elemental.

"If a man goes nap at a Lord Mayor's feast,
He must be like a soup tureen;
That's merely starvation, a famine diet,
The dinner of herbs you give a ryot,
Compared to what I have seen.

"I remember once in Afric's wilds,
When I camped at Timbuctoo,
A couple of nigs ate the whole of an ass,
Not because they were hungry, but merely to pass
The time, as they'd nothing to do.

"A trifle," they said. "It had whetted their teeth,"
And they grinned upon one another.
I explained with a frown that the beast was mine,
And the next time they wished on an ass to dine,
They had better begin on each other.

"I saw a lad in the Sandwich Isles,
Of his simple clothing denuded,
Once eat his way right into a shark,
Till all you could see was a cavern dark,
Whence a couple of toes protruded.

"Yet even these are left in the shade
For insatiable voracity
By that terrible beast the hunting dog,
Whose omnivorous stomach the fattest hog
Would envy for wholesale capacity.

"I will tell you the tale, which some would call
strange,
If to hear it you would care.
No proof I can offer you, I'm afraid.
You must take my word, which has never strayed
From the truth by the breadth of a hair.

"I was out by Nagpur alone and on foot,
On the track of a buffalo,
When I heard in the distance a whining yelp,
And I jumped as if shot and looked for help,
For at once I knew the foe.

"'Twas the hunting dog, who runs in packs,
With an ever quenchless hate,
Who, once he has scented the trail of his prey,
Will tirelessly follow it day by day,
Like a demon of vengeful fate.

“ I glanced behind ; there were twenty dogs
In a line with their noses down,
Laid out on my track, and galloping on,
While the setting sun all luridly shone
On their coats of a rufous brown.

“ The plain was bare, but a mile away
Stood a single Jámun tree,
And, before you could wink, I was going strong,
With the gait of a kangaroo bounding along,
Elastic and rapid and free.

“ My record for doing the measured mile
In four and the fifth of a second
Has never been beaten yet, I believe,
Except upon that momentous eve,
When 'twas under three minutes, I reckoned.

“ I fled like a flash, but do what I would,
The canines gained ground at each stride ;
So at last I turned, took a deadly pot,
And the leader fell to the ringing shot,
Which went through his head, and he died.

“ His friends in a trice devoured their king,
Whom till now they had faithfully followed.
In a moment he disappeared, like the egg
Which a juggler picks from the calf of your
leg,
So swiftly their monarch they swallowed.

“Again I was tearing along, and again
The wild hounds bayed on my track,
And again I fired and the leader fell,
To vanish at once with a savage yell
Down the throats of the ravening pack.

“Ten times this happened, and when at last
I swarmed up that Jámun trunk,
And left a boot in a wild dog’s jaw,
I experienced a feeling of pious awe,
Which you might have mistaken for funk.

“I sat on a branch and counted the foe.
There were ten, taking one with another,
The portliest ever that came in my way,
For each was a double dog, you might say,
Whose skin covered self and a brother.

“But ’twas not a time that one would choose
To study Natural History.
I fired with ever increasing elation,
And each time they devoured their deceased
relation,
But how was inscrutable mystery.

“Their skins grew tight, yet they never flinched,
But went at it tooth and nail ;
Each time going slower, it must be confessed,
But always determined to do their best,
From their cousin’s head to his tail.

“We can boast of our civilization and laws,
Of our British endurance rare,
But for earnest response to duty's call
The wild dog of Ind will beat us all;
He's the doggedest dog, I swear.

“At last only two were left. I fired,
And all were dead except one,
A veteran beast with a lion heart,
Who wasted no time at once to start
On a toil so well begun.

“His eyes were bulging. What cared he?
As long as the deed was to do?
Should the last of the pack be the first to shirk?
Not he! He would die, but he'd finish the work.
He would see the matter through.

“So at it he went in a business-like way
With a calm determination;
And slowly he worked from limb to limb,
With a steady persistence, stern and grim,
Which filled me with admiration.

“I stared with surprise. Would he succeed?
Or was his ambition too great?
I could see him swelling beneath my eye,
But on he struggled, and hope beat high,
As at length he came into the straight.

“The tail, four paws, and a bone or two,
He swallowed them one by one.

Hurrah ! it was over. The gorgeous repast,
The banquet of Titans, was finished at last,
The miraculous task was done.

“Very slowly and stiff he rose to his feet,
And gravely stood his ground.
He looked like a swollen, gigantic balloon,
A plum-pudding huge, a canine full moon,
Or a sphere mathematically round.

“The skin like a bladder was stretched quite tight,
So that each individual hair
Stood two inches apart, and the space between
Had the polished, smooth, and glimmering sheen
Of alabaster rare.

“His eyes were staring. They could not blink,
Nor move from side to side.
The tail was stiff and packed to the end,
The legs were bulgy and could not bend,
The jaws were gaping wide.

“But still upon me he glared in the tree,
And feebly tried to hop.
As if he would say, ‘I’ve not had enough.
I could pack you in as a bit of plum-duff.
You would lie quite light on the top.’

“’Twas useless to shoot, but the thing I did
Was the act of a silly loon,
And might very well have cost me my life :
I opened and dropped my hunting knife
On the back of the canine full moon.

“There came a burst of thunder sound.

The dog, oh, where was he?

Ask of the winds, which far around

With canine fragments strewed the ground,

But it's no use asking me.

“The knife with a prick had done the trick,

And exploded the beast into space.

So great was the force of the awful concussion,

I was fired through the air, like a bomb-shot

Russian

One hundred yards from the place.”

IV. THE FATE OF FINNIGAN WEAVER

It was only last night at the bar of the Club
 That the Colonel told the tale
 Of the wild red dog's tremendous explosion,
 And of how he shot off in the fearful commotion
 Like an aeroplane going full sail.

There followed a pause, and we all drank deep
 As feeling the need of support;
 When that giddy young Binks, our D. S. P.,*
 Broke in with a giggling, "He! he! he!"
 That yarn's not half a bad sort.

"It calls to mind an occurrence strange
 That happened in Jalpaigori,"
 But the Colonel quickly raised his hand:
 "My youthful sir, do I understand
 That you wish to cap my story?"

"Before you venture, prithee hear
 The fate of young Finnigan Weaver,
 The only man who ever tried
 To cap my tale. Well! the idiot died,
 But not of a lingering fever.

* District Superintendent of Police.

“ ’Twas in Mutiny days, in Agra Fort,
We were shut up like fish in a creel
By the Pandies,* who held the town uncontrolled.
One evening at mess I casually told
That tale about Algernon Steele,

“ When Weaver got up, of the 77th,
A captain, who ought to know better :
About your size, the same coloured hair,
And your musical laugh, so sweet and rare—
Just a copy of you to the letter.

“ And he said, ‘ That’s a capital yarn, Bertie Long,
But it won’t compare in the least
To the tale of what happened to me near Madras.
It is strange what miracles come to pass
In this magical land of the East.

‘ A man-eating tiger was on the rampage
In the jungles of Burra Jhut, †
Who ate men by the score, as bears eat bun,
And as I was passing and fond of the fun,
I determined the beggar to shoot.

“ ’Twas an agéd man who came to my tent
And brought me the latest khabar.
As like your jungle child as two pins,
For his face was seamed by perpetual grins,
Which went bending about like rubber.

* Mutineers.

† Big lie.

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‘And he cried, “Dis berry big tiger, sah,
And he just hab slain my wife.
You will find de old image out dere in de wood.
Dat tiger he make me one riddance good,
For she been de bane of my life !

“I’ll show you de place, but dis tiger, my lord,
He one dam old magic beast.
De people he kills he puts under a charm,
And turns dem to friends to guard him from
harm,
When he makes upon dem his feast.”

“What rot !” I cried. “Just you show me the
corpse !

And stow your infernal gas !
You’ve got to do with Finnigan Weaver,
And if you are coming the gay deceiver,
You can write yourself down an ass.”

‘You know, my friends, I’m a hero brave,
From my crown right down to my boot ;
And of course you will guess, that very same night
I sat up to watch by the pale moonlight
For the tiger of Burra Jhut.

‘The old woman’s corpse beneath me lay,
I could see the bones and skin,
And I rubbed my eyes and began to blink,
For it seemed the old lady was trying to wink,
As her lips went up in a grin.

‘And I called to mind what the old man said
About the magic spell ;
And though not in the least inclined to funk,
Yet still I had rather be in my bunk
Than out in the woodland dell.

‘The hours went by, when I heard the noise
Of an animal far away drinking.
I glanced at the corpse, and started to see
One long arm rise slowly and point up at me,
And the eyes were decidedly winking.

‘What the jungle child had said of the spell
Was true, I was forced to agree.
The corpse, by the tiger though rent and torn,
Was doing its best the beast to warn
By pointing me out in the tree.

‘I confess that my hair began to rise,
And I felt as cold as a stone ;
But I pulled at my flask, and fiercely swore,
“I’d be beat by no tiger’s magic lore,
Nor the arts of a jungle crone.”

‘I quickly dropped to the ground, and stepped
To where the corpse lay prone.
I bent the arm to the scraggy side
And bound it firm with a strip of hide.
Did the body sigh or groan ?

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‘I did not enquire, but in half a jiff

I was back on my airy seat,
And I chuckled to think I had bested the ghost,
For now I would have the tiger on toast,
When he came his dinner to eat.

‘Then I heard a roar from the neighbouring hill.

’Twas the tiger ranging free.
I looked at the corpse. Slow the other arm
Arose by the power of the magic charm,
And pointed again at the tree.

‘I shinned down quick, and climbed back as
before,

After pegging the accusing limb,
When the old lady’s leg uplifted slow,
And pointed at me with its skinny toe,
In a silent warning grim.

‘I was not to be done, and again got down,
And secured the leg to the bank;

But was no sooner back, when the other leg rose,
And endeavoured my hiding-place to disclose
With its long and bony shank.

‘Once more I descended, and tied the limb
To a bit of a root in the ground,

And again climbed back, and thought with a smile,
“Ha, ha! my old lady, your ghostly guile
Will be puzzled this time, I’ll be bound.

“You are spread-eagled now and no mistake!”

Then I heard the tiger's tread
And carefully levelled my trusty rifle
With a joy I found it hard to stifle,
For the beast was as good as dead.

‘He would trust to the charm and walk into the
trap,

And again I chuckled with glee,
When the jaws of the corpse went opening wide,
And a long tongue emerged from the cavern inside,
And pointed straight upwards at me.’

“I had listened so far to Finnigan's tale,
And bottled my temper tight;
But this was too much for human strength,
And I felt that the time had come at length
To assert a manifest right.

“So up I jumped and cried, ‘Captain Weaver,
You have made a parody vile
On the tale I told. You have hinted thereby
That I, Captain Longbow, have told a lie,
And you dare to stand there and smile.

‘Let me tell you, sir, no tale of mine
Of falsehood has ever a trace,
But as for your yarn, it's a parcel of lies.
You're a liar yourself, sir, damn your eyes!’
And I threw my glass in his face.

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“In those good old days a gentleman still
 Could give and take satisfaction
In the good old way. Next morn found us both,
With pistols loaded, and neither loath
 To come at once to action.

“Our seconds had chosen a spot retired,
 Just beyond the wall in the rear,
Where no enemy showed. As we stood apart,
My foe took a deadly aim at my heart.
 He was bent upon blood, it was clear.

“But he little knew me. I determined to give
 A lesson to last him his life.
'Tis an old trick of mine, and productive of fun.
Quite easy, if only you know how it's done,
 And an excellent healer of strife.

“It was Major Smith who gave the word
 Which should both our fates have decided ;
But instead of the one of us going to pot,
Two bangs were heard, and a shower of small shot
Splashed around us like drops of water hot,
 For in mid air the balls had collided.

“You may well look surprised, and raise your brows,
 For it takes a bit of doing,
Until you have learned the little trick ;
And even then it is well to be quick,
For unless you fire in the very nick,
 You will find there is trouble brewing.

“It was new to the Weaver, who loudly swore
His seconds were up to their jokes.
They had loaded the pistols with shot for snipe,
And only their blood away could wipe
The insult of a hoax.

“But the seconds protested their innocence clear,
And gave him the weapons to load,
But the end was the same. A shower of fine lead
Flew stinging about his face and head,
But no wound on the combatants showed.

“He began to awake to the facts of the case,
And his hand commenced to tremble.
In his eyes came a look of haunting pain,
But he cried, ‘It’s a fluke. Let us try it again!’
And he strove his fear to dissemble.

“He had lots of pluck, I will grant that,
For he knew himself in my power.
Again we fired, and again the pair
Of balls collided in middle air,
And around fell the leaden shower.

“This was too much for Fin. His face went
white,
And he stammered, ‘I will apol——’,
When suddenly forth a volley flew
From a murderous band of Pandies, who
Had crept up behind a knoll.

"Finnigan fell, all riddled with balls,
And the rest of us ran at the double.
Well, there is the count of the man who tried
In public a yarn of mine to deride,
And of how he got into trouble.

"And now, Mr. Binks, may I ask what it was
That happened at Jalpaigori?"
And the Colonel arose with his glass in his hand,
And he smiled like a seraph, so sweet and bland.
"Will you kindly begin your story."

And he glared from his height of six foot two
Upon Binks with his five foot four.
But a tremor pervaded that D.S.P.
And, "I fear I've forgotten, dear Colonel," said he,
As he swiftly escaped by the door.

V. HOW HE WON THE V.C.

“THE V.C. I have earned
Some dozen times at least,”
Said the Colonel, trying to fill
The bottomless thirst of the East.
There were men who came from near,
And some who came from far,
And each man tried to go with pride
A better one at the bar.

“I regard that decoration
As dearer than untold wealth,”
The Colonel went on, when we'd drunk
A bumper to his health.
“I earned it many times,
But I gained it through a mistake.
’Tis sad to confess, but it’s true none the less,
The noble deed was a fake.

“Some strange fatality
There was about that cross.
When I made a bid, whatever I did
I always took a toss.

It was often want of proof,
Or because the Staff were jealous.
When I worked as a sub, I had many a snub
For daring to be too zealous.

“I blew up the Delhi Gate,
And hoped the cross to receive,
But they simply wrote me ‘Absent
From duty, without taking leave.’
I fancy they were afraid
That I might capture the town,
And rob their wonderful generals
Of glory and great renown.

“And then I charged the Pandies,*
And saved that young fool, Dory.
As brave an act as any, in fact,
That is sung of in ancient story.
But the crisis upset his reason,
For Dory was ready to swear
That 'twas he in the strife who had saved my life,
And the cross should therefore wear.

“He was hit and dropped the reins,
When I sprang to his horse's back,
And striking right and left,
I brought him out of the rack;
But the beggar made good his story,
While my tale was openly spurned,
And they gave that blighter, Dory,
The cross which I had earned.

* The mutineers.

“And then our old Subahdar,
 Sher Khan, of Slasher’s Horse,
I saved his life so often
 That it got quite a matter of course.
The old lion-heart was brave,
 There was no mistake about that ;
But ’twas past belief how he’d come to grief,
 Being somewhat inclined to fat.

“Then just in the nick of time
 I would gallop through the foe,
And bring him away from the frightful fray
 Across my saddle bow.
My horse got crocked at last
 From always carrying double ;
And it grew a jest when things went wrong,
‘Oh, send for our Bertie, Bertie Long !
 There’s the Subahdar in trouble.’

“But as for getting the cross,
 The Colonel would swear by old Nicholas,
’Twas a blank, blank, five-starred joke,
 And the affair was getting ridiculous.
‘By all means give a lift
 To your agéd friend so fat.
But don’t come to me for a ruddy V.C.
 For a blankety thing like that.’

“That ancient Subahdar
 Then came to my relief,
And concocted a plan, did that noble man,
 Which solaced all my grief.

It is not every one
Would set the matter to rights,
But then not every man
Has fought in a hundred fights.

“ I was put in charge of a fort
Out there in the wilds of Sehore,
And the nearest Christian soul
Was twenty leagues from my door.
I commanded a company,
One hundred men all told,
Fifty were Sikhs, and the rest
Were Mussulmans, brave and bold.

“ And of course the Subahdar
Was sent along with me.
I was half inclined to leave him behind.
I was getting so ragged, you see.
But the mess cried out to a man,
‘ He’ll die if he lingers here.
Who’ll save his life in the desperate strife
When you’ve gone, our Bertie dear ? ’

“ The old man’s English was shaky,
When on starting, he took me apart,
And tapping his nose, he strove to disclose
Some secret of his heart.
Yet his gruffly whispered speech
Was not quite clear to my mind :
‘ Sahib, V.C. no got. I catching a lot,’
Though he plainly meant to be kind.

“ A hilly jungle tract

Was that country around Sehere.

The woods were full of wild cattle,

And the valleys of savage boar.

And, ‘ Keep up the soldier’s spirit,’

Was ever a maxim of mine,

So I let the Patháns hunt the cattle,

And the Sikhs they went for the swine.

“ Now a follower of the Prophet

You know as well as I,

Than touch the flesh of a pig

Would much prefer to die ;

And the holiness of the cow

Is a Hindu’s most cherished belief,

And a Sikh would lose his soul

If he even mentioned ‘ beef.’

“ They lived on opposite sides

Of that hill fort near Sehere,

And the Mussulmans filled up with beef,

And the Sikhs they gorged on boar ;

And then by way of a lark,

When they’d picked the bones quite clean,

They would throw them at each other,

Across the court between.

“ With the heat at one hundred and twenty,

You may take my solemn word,

A lark like this may become

A very warlike bird.

The feelings of the men

Each day rose higher and higher,
And unconscious of all, I lived in that fort
On the brink of a rising fire.

“One day in the afternoon,

I was dozing rather late,
When the Subahdar rushed up
In an agitated state,
And, ‘Come, my lord!’ he shouted,
While my pistol he pressed in my hand,
‘I kicking with boots, but the beggars they shoots,
No listening word of command.’

“There was clearly something up,

And I’m nothing if not prompt.
In a wink I followed the Subahdar,
And out to the courtyard romped.
On either side the men
Stood yelling, to madness goaded,
And levelled their weapons across,
And the rifles I saw were loaded.

“I wasted not a moment,

But after one rapid glance,
I rushed between the lines
With a panther’s lightning prance.
‘Throw down your guns!’ I roared,
‘And stop this frenzied folly!’
But the answer I got was a ringing shot,
Followed up by a murderous volley.

“Then at it they went like devils,
In the sulphurous nether pit,
And the air was rent with the groans
Of those who were mortally hit.
The men were butchered in heaps,
For, once they got a start,
And their blood went to boiling point,
’Twas the Dickens the fools to part.

“I emptied my revolver,
Firing left and right,
While up and down I stormed
In the heart of that murderous fight.
My coat was shot to ribbons,
And my hat had a dozen holes,
But still I raged, while around
The men were dropping in shoals.

“At last they threw down their guns,
As a sign that they would yield,
And I stood aghast when I gazed
Upon the battlefield.
Of my gallant company
But twenty men were left.
The rest were lying silent
As if of life bereft.

“’Twas very strange to see
The rivers of blood they shed.
One would judge by the gore that an army corps
In that court was lying dead.

And stranger still was this,
Though my clothing was rent and torn,
My body was whole and unharmed,
As the day when I was born.

“‘How on earth did it happen?’ I asked.
The Subahdar replied,
‘They throwing bones of pig and beef,
From one to other side,
And then they going mad,
And firing at each other.
The truth I tell to the Honourable Sahib,
Who is my father and mother.’

“Five alone of the twenty
In the fight had taken no part.
The rest I ordered to load up the dead
In the regimental cart,
And carry them out and burn
The Sikhs by their custom old,
But the Mussulmans bury deep
And cover with rocks and mould.

“Meanwhile I went to quarters,
And wrote a complete report
Of that very awful combat
That was waged in the tiny fort.
And a big court-martial was held
Which conducted a full enquiry,
And when they had finished, the Colonel
Thus spoke in accents fiery—

“ ‘Of a more d—dashery act
I’ve neither read nor heard.
The danger of almost certain death
In your country’s cause you incurred.
By a miracle you escaped,
And I have the pinkiest pleasure
In commending you for the Victoria Cross,
The soldier’s most sanguineous treasure.’

“ This time no want of evidence
Could rob me of my meed,
As the faithful five and the Subahdar
Were witness of the deed.
And the fifteen who had surrendered
Were sent to their homes in disgrace.
For enough had been killed and red blood spilled
To curse for ever the place.

“ A year went on and I
Had taken leave to Pindi,
Where I heard there was a chance
Of seeing a frontier shindy.
I was present at a review,
When the Hoppers’ Brigade went by,
In all their pride, with a swinging stride,
And fire in each martial eye.

“ Like Nap. and other great men,
I never forget a face.
No matter what time has passed,
I remember each line and trace.

Then judge of my surprise,
When there passed with warlike port
Those eighty dead men I had seen
Stretched lifeless in the fort.

“There was no shadow of doubt.
I recognized each man,
And as they passed a knowing grin
Across their features ran.
I counted them, eighty told,
Who should have been buried or burned,
Who had shed the gore of an army corps
When the V. C. I had earned.

“‘When did you get those men?’
I asked a captain near.
‘A year ago,’ he replied,
‘They’re the best of any here.’
Eighty of my old ‘Die Hards,’
Whom I trained to the soldier’s trade,
Who ought to be dead, were marching instead
The pick of the Hoppers’ Brigade.

“A mystery here lay concealed,
Of which the friend of my youth,
That agéd Subahdar
Knew well, I was sure, the truth.
I retraced my steps post haste,
And sent for the lion-heart old,
And on pain of having his fat head broke,
I bade him the truth unfold.

“‘It was all a banao,’* he muttered,
And trembled at my frown.
‘The men firing blank ammunition,
And then they falling down,
And the faithful five get paint
And keeping in masaks† bound,
But the gadhas‡ pouring so much,
They flooding all the ground.’

“‘But how about the holes
That were cut in my coat and hat?’
‘Sahib, your faithful slave,
This humble worm did that.
I was the only sepoy
Who holding loaded gun,
And I stood behind the Sahib,
And that is how it done.

“‘We call the Honourable Sahib
The Fool of the Regiment.’
‘What the deuce do you mean?’ I roared,
But the fat one lowly bent.
‘Fool§ in our tongue is flower.
The Sahib of all his race
Is the perfect lily and rose,
So lovely is his face.

“‘We thinking very easy
The Sahib to deceive,
And the men they want go home,
For long they no get leave,

* Make-up, a fake.

† Leather bags.

‡ Donkeys.

§ *Phul* means “flower.”

And Sahib he try for V.C.,
But never it have got,
And——' 'Shut up,' I cried, 'you idiot,
And stow your bally rot!'

"'But what about my revolver?'
'The bullets were drawn,' he said.
'And whenever Sahib firing
The men they falling dead.'
That cleared another marvel,
For I'd noticed when I fired
The men in twos and threes
Had thrown up their arms and expired.

"Well! here was a pretty fix.
What on earth was I to do?
Looked at in any way,
I was in the deuce of a stew.
If I published the tale, the world
Would be one almighty laugh.
There'd be no end to the jokes,
The jeers, the jests, and the chaff.

"Or if I kept mum and said nothing?—
That miserable Subahdar
As the very worst shot in Asia
Had a fame that was published far.
I had never been in such danger
As on that awful day,
With him blazing point blank through my hat,
Whenever I looked away.

“Consider it how you will,
The cross I had richly deserved,
So mum I kept, and till now
The secret’s been well preserved.
So, gentlemen, fill your glasses.
No moaning on the bar.
Here’s a health for all, both great and small,
‘That old fraud, the Subahdar!’”

VI. HIS ROYAL PROGRESS

I

“YOU may have remarked,” the Colonel said,
“That I’m not a lady’s man.
No lap-dog I, to be combed and dressed,
To sit up and beg and be fondly caressed,
As I play with the darling’s fan.”

The Colonel is six foot two in his socks,
And rough and hard as a log,
And we all agreed with courtly tact,
That we had not failed to observe the fact,
He was not a lady’s lap-dog.

“And yet you’ll find most critics allow
That I have a figure and form,
An eighteenth-century manner and style,
Well fitted the softer sex to beguile,
And the feminine heart to storm.

“It is not that I mistrust my powers.
The truth is quite the reverse.
But I’ve found if you give them a chance for
adoring,
The wealth of affection they’re bent upon pouring
Amounts to a positive curse.

“Did I tell you that I am a married man?

That is, if the dear girl exists,
For it's fifty years since I fled from her arms;
Though still when I dream, her opulent charms
Come back through memory's mists.

“Her lips and eyes and capacious smile,
The curves of her lissome back,
The grace of her shape, perhaps a thought too
stout;
But her principal asset without a doubt
Was her colour, a lovely blue-black.

II

“But I'd better begin at the very beginning,
To anticipate seldom pleases.
'Twas in forty-two that I sailed for the strand
Where there is no coral and the coolie bland
Supplies the spicy breezes.

“By the Afric shore our anchor was cast
To replenish the tanks gone dry,
When, a party of youngsters, we left the ship
To stretch our legs on a hunting trip
In the wooded coast hard by.

“We were new to the work and we wandered far
Through many a forest glade.
Then the weather being really remarkably hot,
We got out the beer in a likely spot,
And sat down to drink in the shade.

“ Young Biffen had finished his second quart,
And was drawing the cork of a third,
While I was singing a rollicking stave
Of how I enjoyed a life on the wave,
A remark which I knew was absurd.

“ And the rest were trying to do a snooze,
When a sudden and fearful yell
Arose from the forest all around,
And out there rushed at the ominous sound
What seemed like devils of hell.

“ They were warriors fierce of a cannibal tribe,
The horrible Hullaballu,
Led on to the charge by Bong-i-Wong,
The monarch ferocious, huge, and strong
Of that awful omnivorous crew.

“ We were knocked out of time in less than a trice,
And carried away on their shoulders,
And when I awoke with a splitting head,
I found we were camped in a river bed,
Surrounded by massive boulders.

III

The niggers were taking their midday meal,
And cramming elastic maws,
And just in time I saw quite clear
The calf of young Biffen disappear
Through Bong-i-Wong's mighty jaws.

I fell back with horror, when, glancing above,
I perceived a hairy mop
Rise over a stone, and just beneath
Two languishing eyes and some ivory teeth
That were daintily picking a chop.

It was little Loblolly, old Bong-i-Wong's heiress,
The Pride of the Hullaballus,
Whom her father desired to marry to Gosh,
A Prince of the tribe of the No-Wosh-i-Wosh,
Though the maiden had contrary views.

And so in a huff she had left her dad,
And seated herself by a tree,
And was coyly engaged in taking her tiffin
Off a tasty bit of the late Master Biffen,
When by chance she spotted me.

When I marked the extent of her cavernous
smile,

A tremour struck chill to my heart ;
But I soon discovered in this I was wrong,
For the charming young daughter of Bong-i-Wong
Had been struck by Dan Cupid's dart.

"I thought as her eyes devoured my face,
That her teeth wished to follow suit ;
But she speedily set my mind at rest,
And shily her maiden affection confessed
By offering me Biffen's foot.

"This I firmly declined, but peace restored
By chucking her under the chin.
'Twas a manifest case of love at first sight,
As she gurgled, 'Yum! yum!' with a wild
delight,
And a circum-capital grin.

"Our wooing proceeded apace, and she got
So far as to tweak my nose,
When Bong-i-Wong thundered, 'Jabbar U Jay!'
Which means, 'Will you dish up the *entremêt*!'
And at once young Gosh arose.

"He took up his bludgeon and stepped across
To where we were growing quite festive.
I'd been kept to the last as a juicy tit-bit,
A nice toothsome *plât* that would comfortably fit
On the top as a mild digestive.

"He whirled his weapon above my head,
When Lolly, most thoughtful of ladies,
Yelled out, 'O Waggery Baggery Pape!'
Which, freely translated, is, 'Son of an Ape!
Get out! or I'll send you to Hades.'

"This brought great Bong-i-wong on the scene,
When Lolly in accents pert,
Explained I was the man she had chosen to
wed,
And if Dad refused, she would kill herself dead,
And then he would get his dessert.

“I can hardly believe she was making a pun,
In a fix so horribly grave ;
But she whipped out a knife and swore by
All’s Blue,
That the day he was born her father would rue,
If he did not her Duckie Boy save.

IV

“His Majesty found she had cornered him tight,
So wisely the matter referred
To a council of experts in tribal tradition,
Who at once all the precedents passed in revision
And each tittle of evidence heard.

“And at last they decided that I and Gosh
For the maiden’s hand should fight,
A combat *à outrance*, and hand to hand,
And weaponless all, at once on the strand,
And Heaven defend the right !

“They explained this by gesture. Loblolly demurred,
But right willingly I agreed.
I had sat at the feet of the Putney Pet,
And know how to use my maulies, you bet,
When it comes to a pressing need.

“Now Gosh was a trifle of eighteen stone,
With a fist like a Nasmyth hammer ;
But when with an elephantine prance,
He proceeded his ugly black phiz to advance,
Of the noble art, I could see at a glance,
He did not know even the grammar.

“ In Round Number One I tripped him up,
Which was scarcely according to Cocker.
In Round Number Two I came home with my right
On the tip of his conk, and in woeful plight
He fell to a regular rocker.

“ Number Three was the last. My left got him fair
In the midst of his dexter peeper,
While my right on his Mark made a squelching
sound,
And Gosh subsided and lay on the ground,
As still as a railway sleeper.

“ Loblolly then throwing herself into my arms,
We were married without delay
By a priest like an ebon edition of Moses,
And the holy rite of the rubbing of noses
Made us one for ever and aye.

V

“ By the law of nations, Great Gosh became
My personal property,
And this child of nature, chock-full of emotion,
Repaid me his hiding by dog-like devotion,
For he practically worshipped me.

“ In friendship's bond his heart was held
As if by a man-o'-war's anchor,
And just for some exercise after lunch,
He would often implore me his head to punch,
Which showed that he bore no rancour.

“And what of the Pride of the Hullaballus,
My winsome and grinsome Loblolly?
With ordinary care when I kissed the child
That my head did not enter her mouth when she
smiled,
Our life was exceedingly jolly.

“Her clothing was simple, a necklace of beads,
Of glass that was none but the best.
Yet the envious gossips e'en up to the last
Condemned her for being too awfully fast,
On the plea she was overdressed.

“She was all that is kind and loving and true.
I've already described her figure.
No doubt she had faults. But one bone was
found
Of the girl whose waist I'd begun to surround.
She was really a kind-hearted nigger.

“And soon our union was crowned with bliss
In the shape of a numerous progeny.
Two lots of twins were good as a start,
And positive proof my paternal heart
Was no advocate of misogyny.

“Whisky and Soda we christened the first.
The next were Judy and Punch.
Then came Richard and Bess in due succession,
And dear little Montague closed the procession,
Whom we loved as the best of the bunch.

“But Lolly, the Pride of the Hullaballus,
Had a soul which was ever ambitious,
And given the time, she'd have run up the score
To a good two dozen or something more,
If her luck had not proved capricious.

“For Monty had just cut his second tooth,
When the great King Bong-i-Wong died.
He had sworn, the old Dreadnought, that he
could eat
The whole of an ox from the head to the feet,
And he fell, a martyr to pride.

“By the unanimous choice of the Hullaballus,
And their friends the No-Wosh-i-Wosh,
I was raised to the throne of the monarch deceased,
With Lolly as Queen, and last but not least,
My Chamberlain Grand was that faithful beast,
The exemplary menial Gosh.

VI

“I governed the tribes for a couple of months,
With a rule at once firm but urbane ;
And though never to Loblolly's charms I was blind,
I longed at last to return to my kind,
And to see a white face again.

“To think and to act with me are the same.
I assembled a levy in force,
And sent them to fight with the Thundryn Biggands,
A border tribe of unprincipled brigands,
And our foes as a matter of course.

“ And then with the Queen and the Chamberlain
And the troop of the Royal Scions,
I went on tour through the Imperial Domain,
O’er many a hill and valley and plain,
The haunt of bears and lions.

“ But ever I edged away to the east,
With intention the realm to flee,
To give my Hullaballus the slip,
And make for the shore, where a passing ship
Might carry me over the sea.

“ And our guide through the jungle’s devious ways
Was the foolish but well-meaning Gosh,
Who declared he knew each rock and stump,
But in fact his topographical bump
Might be aptly described as ‘Tosh.’

“ He lost the way ten times a day,
Till at length our position grew serious,
For we found ourselves stopped by a *cul de sac* ;
When to add to the woes of my retinue black,
I fell ill with fever and sank on my back,
And promptly became delirious.

VII

“ ’Twas weeks before I awoke to sense,
To discover my beauteous Lolly
Was weeping and tearing her woolly hair,
While she hung o’er my couch with devotion rare,
The picture of melancholy.

“ I asked for Gosh. That loyal slave
Had been lost for a month and more
In a futile endeavour to find the way,
But by luck had returned that very same day
And was sleeping on guard at the door.

“ I glanced around to find myself
Within a gloomy cave.
'Twas dark and still and silent all,
And the only sound in that rock-built hall
Was the snore of the faithful slave.

“ But where were the offspring of Royal Stock ? ”
I enquired of my dark-eyed Queen.
Her Majesty wept like a river in flood.
“ They're gone,” she sighed, “ each whitey-brown
bud,
And never again will be seen ! ”

“ ‘ By the Ghost of Great Cæsar ! ’ I cried in
amaze,
‘ Where the deuce have the beggars departed ? ’
She opened her mouth to its fullest extent,
And, ‘ That is the way the family went,’
She gasped with a groan, broken-hearted.

“ And then with choking sobs and sighs,
And tears in a perfect ocean,
The truth came out, which shows how great
Is a woman's love for her stricken mate,
How fathomless her devotion.

“Great Gosh had gone, she knew not where,
And without were roaring lions.
She could not leave me lying at length,
And the only chance to keep up her strength
Was to swallow the Royal Scions.

“The Dauphin went first, then the Princess Royal,
Both wonderfully tender and true.
Then followed the rest. I will not repeat
How oft she declared, ‘They were, oh ! so sweet !
Especially Montague !’

VIII

“How could I utter a word of reproach
To add to her anguish and pain ?
She had done her best to ease my care,
So I soothed her by tugging her woolly hair,
And cried, ‘Cheer up ! ’Tis vain to despair.
We must start all over again

“‘To build up a dynasty Number Two ;’
But at heart I was filled with gloom,
For though I knew it was thankless folly,
I began to regard my fair Loblolly
In the light of a family tomb.

“And I could not help thinking, if Montague
Had not lasted as long as he did,
Would Lolly to fast have remained content,
Or should I have gone the way they went,
And adown that red funnel slid ?

“But ’twas foolish to think of what might have been.

The past was beyond all mending.

So I praised her sublime and conjugal love,
And called her ‘my only and coal-black dove,’

Till I charmed back her smile unending.

“Then Gosh was sent on the hunting path,

And after losing his way

Some dozen of times, the faithful dog

Returned at last with a fine wart hog,

Which was welcome as flowers in May.

IX

“The Queen and the Chamberlain nursed their King,

Till at last I was fit to travel;

When, one day, as all was still in the house,

I seized the chance to my regal spouse

The web of my thoughts to unravel.

“‘You may have observed, dear Lolly,’ I said,

‘That the amiable Gosh is a dunce.

I intend to go home to England fair,

But we can’t take the lubber along with us there,

So let’s send him away at once!’

“By this I intended with pardonable guile

My cannibal queen should conclude

That she was going to accompany me.

But this was impossible, you’ll agree.

With no clothing to speak of, how could she

On a garden party intrude?

“But Lolly objected. ‘He’ll never get home,
For he’ll lose his way and perish,
And the day may come when provisions give out,
And our Gosh is well favoured and passably stout.
I think, my dear, without reasonable doubt
Our Chamberlain we should cherish.’

“And then she said something I could not catch
About a dish surprising,
And the different ingredients you should apply
When you undertake to construct a pie,
And to make it appetising.

X

“That evening I led great Gosh aside,
And said to him, ‘Honest black!
Disrespect for the Queen I’ve no wish to show.
We shall find her, I fear, a trifle *de trop*.
Let us make a strategic retreat, and go.
She will probably find her way back.’”

“This was playing it rather low down upon Lolly,
I frankly confess my fault.
Yet to speak the truth is ever the best.
I was awfully afraid of joining the rest
In a nook of the Royal Vault.

“But Gosh scratched his head. The Queen she
was plump.
It was simply sinful to waste.

And hogs were not always easy to find,
And when for a week he had not dined,
A stew was a thing to which he inclined.
It had such a comforting taste.

“I had hoped to get rid of them one by one,
And become a free man again,
But their mutual regard was intensely warm,
And it took such a common-sense, practical
form
That my tactics were all in vain.

XI

“At length our painful march we resumed,
And got along fairly fast,
For I went first to find the way,
Then Gosh strode along quite airy and gay,
And the Mausoleum came last.

“In a week or so we struck a stream,
Which of course flowed down to the ocean ;
And at my suggestion a log we found,
Which would carry the party safe and sound
With a tranquil and easy motion.

“Great Gosh and the Queen at first refused,
For it seemed that neither could swim.
While noting the fact, I urged them the more
To remember the oath of allegiance they swore,
And not yield to a foolish whim.

“They submitted with no very willing grace,
And we all embarked on the craft.
Great Gosh as crew was ensconced in the bow.
Amidships the Queen with an anxious brow,
And as Captain I sat in the aft.

“As a pleasure trip it was not a success,
For Gosh at once went to sleep;
And far from showing a countenance merry,
The Queen was the leakiest cemetery,
For she never did aught but weep.

“And now our diet was solely fish,
Which both of my subjects hating,
They declared that it gave them a ‘Cobley Wob
Drummy,’
An African idiom for pain in the tummy,
Of a nature excruciating.

“So whenever we took our meagre meal,
The Queen sprang a wetter leak,
In lamenting her Monty, her Whisky and Soda,
And the thought of their tenderness seemed to
explode her,
While her heart was too full to speak.

XII

“But every day as my escort became
Perceptibly thinner and thinner,
Their King grew fat on the diet of fish,
Which has always been my favourite dish
At breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

“All day we drifted with the stream,
But at night we camped on shore ;
And I noticed soon that the Queen and the Crew
In my fattening frame took an interest new
Which they had not displayed before.

“I was puzzled at first and scarcely could think
What on earth to make of the matter.
Each anatomical curve they noted,
As they sat by the hour and silently gloated
On my form, growing fatter and fatter.

“One night I awoke to find the Queen
Was pinching my calf when I caught her.
And one morning I found Gosh feeling my ribs,
And I saw that, in spite of some palpable fibs,
His lips were beginning to water.

“Devotion and love are all very well,
And undoubtedly priceless treasures.
If I wished to avoid being masticated
By those who were nearly and dearly related,
It was time to take drastic measures.

XIII

“That very same day on turning a bend,
We came within sight of the sea,
And there was a ship sailing by in the offing.
Great Gosh was asleep, and the Conjugal Coffin
Was as damp as she well could be.

“The log gave a sudden and opportune roll,
And flung us at once overboard.
I dived like a duck, and struck out below,
And when I arose a shrill voice of woe
I heard o’er the rippling waters go,
‘Come back, my edible lord!’

“This adjective with the Hullaballus
Is the dearest term of affection;
But I feared that its sense might be misapplied,
So I turned a deaf ear and swam with the tide
Away in a seaward direction.

“I looked back once. They had climbed on the
craft.

In the foc’s’le Gosh like a frog
Was sitting all hunched and fast asleep,
While behind him the Queen continued to weep,
And the leak she sprang was so wide and deep
That it threatened to swamp the log.

XIV

“Well! there’s the story. The ship picked me up,
And all my troubles ended;
But I often look back on the buried past,
And memories come thronging thick and fast
With joy and sorrow blended.

“Did Loblolly survive and find her way back
To reign o’er the Hullaballus?

Did she take Gosh along as a source of supply?
Did the fount of her tears at last run dry?
Or was the log swamped and did they both die?
I regret I can give you no news.

“Perhaps Gosh reversed the order of things,
And his Queen assimilated;
Or maybe they found wart hogs in force,
And safely returned and in usual course
By the rubbing of noses were mated.

“Howe’er it may be, from my early youth
Till now when the sands have nigh run,
From the softer sex I have kept apart,
For my Queen may turn up to claim my heart,
And that in more senses than one.

“And whenever I drink a whisky peg,
I think of the twins and laugh,
And of Bong-i-Wong, Biffen, and great Gosh’s folly,
And above all my leaky but loving Loblolly,
That Incomparable Cenotaph!”

GOPI

Methuen & Co., Ltd.

Six Shillings

A collection of stories of a highly sensational character. Comedy blends with tragedy to intensify the realism of the scenes depicted. The heroism of love in self-sacrifice is the note most often struck. The title story gives a graphic account of a recent visitation of plague to an Indian city. The gruesome details of the vivid picture throw into strong relief the devotion of the hero and the pluck of his charming little innamorata.

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Pharaoh's Ring

The Dead Hand

Sir Roger Barcroft's Picture

PRESS NOTICES

Contemporary Review.—"We believe that we were the first to welcome Mr. Sherring's remarkable stories in verse, entitled 'The Romance of the Twisted Spear,' and we shall certainly not be the last to welcome his volume of prose stories, which from first to last hold the reader with the same curious and tense fascination. Mr. Sherring has the gift of a story-teller, and it is not that gift in its more familiar form. The author brings us into living contact with his people, and they are absolutely alive. The Indian stories are, perhaps by reason of close familiarity with Indian life, the most striking. The weirdness, the pathos, the humour of the East are in his heart, and we follow with exhaustless interest a story such as that of 'Gopi.' The story of his love affair from boyhood onward with Kamal, the daughter of the jeweller of the Chandni Chauk, is as beautiful a romance as one might wish to read. On the other hand, the story of Old Mossy Face and the Fakir will make many an English back shiver with cold. And for those who like a good combination of English burglars and ghosts, there is the last story in the book. The writer possesses quite unusual powers as a teller of delightful stories."

Pall Mall Gazette.—"Mr. Sherring's twelve stories vary in merit as in the scene of action, but the quality of strength is present in all. We are deeply impressed by the author's powers as a story-teller and by his virile style."

Morning Leader.—"The author is wonderfully versatile. The title story is a narration with a fine, powerful plot and a rather grim vein of humour. Another tale goes to the extreme of Anglo-Indian farce in describing one of the most remarkable cricket matches ever invented. Another, 'The Test Supreme,' perhaps the best in the volume, is a remarkable picture of a wreck and self-sacrifice. The stories are never monotonous. Mr. Sherring is a strikingly original writer with a gift for maintaining a high standard in many different directions."

Globe.—"A collection of excellent short stories, including such a variety of theme, that we are in no danger of finding the perusal monotonous. 'Gopi' is perhaps the best of several Indian stories, all of which are good above the average and show a large knowledge of native ways."

"Mr. Sherring writes equally well on each subject, and shows himself possessed in no small degree of those gifts which are necessary for the successful writer of the short story."

PRESS NOTICES—Continued

Daily Chronicle.—"A fascinating account of a little Hindu scallywag. Mr. Sherring gives an excellent description of the stricken city and of the fear of death which comes upon the people."

Country Life.—"These stories all tell of new things and strange things in a rather rough, unsubtle, but effective style, which suits the subject well."

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PRESS NOTICES—Continued

of 'Jack Gubbins,' he is very good indeed. The stories divide into three classes. There are studies of Indian life wonderfully suggestive and sympathetic, but tending a little too much towards the hilarious. There are studies of the macabre, which strike us as gruesome but unusually well invented, and there are presentations of strange life and character as seen through a jocular and alert mind of much freshness and quickness. The book is amusing and unusual. Mr. Sherring's next book must be watched for."

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PRESS NOTICES—Continued

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"Mr. Sherring's lines are exquisite in simplicity, full of soft phrases rounded with dignity. The two lesser tales tell of service whose fidelity sacrifices itself, and of the vixen turned to woman by sudden love. All four have the true tales' lure, and though in reading them it is the mere incident which seizes, in recollection it is the method of their telling. Mr. Sherring calls his volume 'An attempt to endue with flesh and blood the dry bones of Rajput history.' He has done more than he desired, inasmuch as he has not stopped at mere flesh and blood, but he has set men and women upon their feet, and started them at a swinging pace once more upon the stormy path."

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PRESS NOTICES—Continued

find in them a high insoluble problem. The poet writes as a Rajput would have him write, loyal to a splendid tradition, and it no more occurs to him to question their warrior code than it would to Homer in a similar case. As a result we thrill with him and them in the wild gallantry of the charge, drink to the full the glory of their pride and superb indifference to fate, and feel that it would be well worth while to acknowledge the lordship of chiefs who were kings by might of arm and unbreakable strength of will.

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